

## Chapter 1 - Of Dursleys and Blacks

It was almost completely dark, it was a cold cloudy summer night the only light source was from a light in a distant house the other side of the river. A lone man stood shivering in his thin robes. The man looked around nervously, he was rather annoyed to have such a boring task, although it was considered honorable. But what if You-know-who comes? For all the trouble he had with his family over the years he was still faithful to the good side. What might Voldemort do to him if he was found here? His family was well known to be close to Dumbledore and that would be deadly if he was taken by he-who-must-not-be-named. He did not think he needed to die just yet; he only finished Hogwarts a few years ago. He thought he heard something, taking out his wand he let in a sharp breath. He looked around a few times but saw nothing so he drifted back to his deep thoughts.

The man stared tiredly at the distant house once more, how much he wished to be inside, parting with the rest of his colleagues. Yet he was stuck outside hoping to protect the minister incase of danger. Didn't they realize if they were going to be attacked, he would not be easily outnumbered?

He heard sudden screaming from the inside of the house. The man ran towards the building eager to find out what happened. Unfortunately as he sprinted his foot got caught on something lying on the ground, he tripped and fell down hitting the ground stiffly before progressing down the hill. Everything went spinning all he could see were the different bright flashes of several curses.

He managed to stop himself rolling all the way down the hill and got up slowly. On all sides of him spells were flying filling everything with light, the air seemed to be teeming with them the calm night was now disturbed by the sounds of dozens of incarnations.

He was horrified at the tens of Death Eaters suddenly appearing out of thin air, whipping out his wand he started cursing everything around him. The man suddenly felt a sharp stab on the back as his body went rigid. He had no idea what the spell was all he knew someone cursed him from behind.

He lost balance once more, a hooded person came up to him he took one look at his face before starting to look absolutely disgusted.

"A Weasley, what is one of you doing here? Ah, I should just kill you right now. Maybe one less kid might make your parents happier, less mouths to feed." the Death Eater said menacingly.

" Don't, we might be able to wiggle some information out of him. I heard Weasleys are very close to Dumbledore." replied another person whom Percy couldn't see. His eyes went wide as the second Death Eater came into view. It was easy to recognize him after all his son was his spitting image of his father and his hair seemed to be shining into the night.

"Take him, the battle is over the minister has escaped." ordered Malfoy "The Dark Lord will not be pleased with us after what happened here."

Percy went pale, if he is going to see the Dark Lord then it would most likely mean death, his cruelty was legendary. The Death Eaters dragged him to the house; they bowed deeply when coming inside.

"Lucius! You have not done what I asked you to do! You shall be punished for your failure. " The Dark Lord said, he was sitting on a large, comfortable looking chair that appeared very out of place between the pile of rubbish the fight created.

"Please no my lord. I am sorry." Malfoy whimpered.

"Sometimes a plain 'sorry' is not enough, Lucius. I have asked you to find a way into Hogwarts; you have failed to do that. Now you have failed this misery task." You-know-who shook his head discussed " You are definitely not in my best favour at the moment"

Malfoy went pale " I am sorry, I beg you to see what I have brought before you punish me" he requested bowing once more, to Percy it looked like he was about to kiss You-Know-Who's feet.

"What do you have?" He-who-must-not-be-named asked half heartily." Bring him here!"

Two large Death Eaters picked up Percy and dragged him forward. Percy tried to scream but one of the men kicked him sharply.

"Shut up you red head!" he shouted.

"Be nicer to our guest, Goyle" the Dark Lord said " What is it?"

"A Weasley my lord" Malfoy replied pointing at Percy.

You-know-who reached out to touch Percy's face. Percy tried to move back but was kicked again. He could not help but to feel sick seeing the Dark Lords long, spidery like hand reaching towards him. Every vein was showing and to Percy's dismay the Dark Lord patted his hair.

You-know-who looked thoughtful and asked, "What's your name boy?"

"Percy Weasley, my lord." Percy mumbled.

"Ah look the boy has manners, so unlike Harry Potter. Are you the third son of Arthur Weasley?" The Dark Lord asked smiling sadistically.

"Ye-es" Percy mumbled.

" Release the boy for the time, but don't let him leave yet. We shall have a small chat in a little while." You-know-who commanded. The two Death Eaters that were holding Percy let go and pushed him to the other side of the room.

"Now Lucius, is that your present for me?" Voldemort asked

"Yes, my lord." Malfoy said barely audibly.

"Hardly sufficient, there are many Weasleys but only one Cornelius Fudge" You-know-who replied " Tut, tut. CRUCIO!"

Harry's eyes snapped open almost by habit he reached towards his scar, which at the moment was stinging badly. He got up not paying any attention to the time it was. Walking to the bathroom for a cold shower, he pondered on his latest dream.

Was it a real one or was it another of the ones Voldemort planted into his mind? He hoped it was real; Malfoy deserved what he got. Harry was surprised he was there at all, he had hoped Malfoy would take a while longer to get out of Azkaban. Harry shuddered at the thought of the wizard prison.

In truth he was rather pissed off at the fact he could hardly ever remember the dreams completely. Out of this one he only remembered Percy's face and Malfoy Senior getting tortured. Wait Percy was there? Not that surprising really, considering what had happened last year.

Harry looked at the mirror; he had to admit he didn't look too good. He had a starved appearance as he was horribly thin now it was even more obvious with the fact that he has grow a large amount over the year, he was now taller than Ron. He tried to flatten his hair; he stared at his Aunt's gel. He stared at it for a second or so before deciding to try it. Harry put large slabs of gel into his hair, by the time he had finished his hair was flat parting to either side of his forehead revealing his scar. Harry had to admit apart from the bags under his eyes, he was decent looking. If only he didn't have to wear those hideous glasses.

Harry sat in his room reading his old textbooks and eating sweets. It seemed the only thing his friends had gotten him for his birthday was large amounts of chocolate and other sweets. It was nice enough but it did not compare with his usual gifts, maybe they ran out of ideas.

Harry frowned, his friends had not written him anything all summer. The only post he had gotten were messages from Remus every three days, they usually inquired if he was okay but said little else. Even with his presents there were no notes merely names from who each one was. Harry suddenly felt very lonely "Are they truly your friends?" asked a high cold voice inside his head. Harry however was too

consumed by his aunt shouting something from outside his bedroom door.

"You boy! What do you think you were doing you woke Dudley up!"

Harry groaned and opened the door " I am sorry Aunt Petunia I didn't think anybody would be still asleep."

Aunt Petunia looked shocked " It's three in the morning! What were you thinking!"

"I wasn't thinking anything, now can't you just leave me alone." Harry said uninterested.

"What is that in the window?" his Aunt shrieked making Harry jump. He turned around noticing an owl carrying a letter flying towards the house. Harry reached the window opening it just in time for the owl to fly through, it settled comfortably on Harry's shoulder while he took the letter off. Harry opened it and read it.

Dear Harry,

We will pick you up at 5 o'clock today, be ready. Don't worry about your aunt and uncle they will be taken care of.

Remus

Harry sighed looking at his aunt " I suppose I better get some sleep" he didn't take another look at his relative he stumbled back to bed.

Harry woke up some hours later this time not disturbed by dreams but by the sunshine coming into his room. He got up and went down to get some breakfast.

"Good Morning everybody!" he said in a mock pleasant tone, Dudley started laughing madly.

"Don't you mean good afternoon?" he asked." Or maybe they don't teach how to tell time at that school of yours? Can't you sleep at normal times like every normal person? It's very annoying if

somebody is taking a shower in the middle of the night next door to where you are trying to sleep"

"Sorry Dudley. I'll try not to do that again." Harry replied checked the time on the shelf, it was nearly three in the afternoon. Harry ignored the rest of his family and made himself some toast. Taking his uncle's newspaper from this morning, he leafed through it hoping to see anything about any mysterious killings or disappearances. Having found nothing he left the rest of his food on the table and went back to his room.

Slowly he gathered all his belongings and stuffed them in his trunk, they hardly fit inside. He picked up the letter he had gotten from Professor McGonagall telling him he was the new Quidditch captain. Harry sighed he would have to refuse the job; he did not want to play Quidditch this year.

He noticed his parents' photo album lying on the floor; Harry really didn't want to see it ever again. He picked it up and slowly did something he would never thought of doing before. He didn't want to leave any traces of being here so he took everything with him.

Harry waited patiently reading yet not concentrating on the book; in truth he was not even sure he wanted to leave. The Dursle's were not pleasant, but where might Remus and others take him? Around five he heard shuffling of feet downstairs.

"Harry, you there?" he heard Lupin ask

"In my room" Harry shouted. Soon there were at least twenty Aurors in his room. "Great, it a social gathering. Where are you taking me and how are we getting there?"

"We are taking you to the Headquarters and we are using brooms" Mad Eye replied picking up Harry's trunk.

"Then we have I problem, I can't fly. I don't have my broom remember?" Harry stated annoyed.

"Oh yes I forgot, we don't have any spares and I don't think it's save to fly in pairs" Lupin asked, "It's rather unfortunate."

"We can use a portkey," said one of the Aurors who Harry has not met before.

Everyone nodded and crowded around an old teddy bear that looked like its head will fall off any second. On the count of three they all grabbed the toy. Harry closed his eyes, traveling this way brought back a lot of unpleasant memories. When he opened is eyes he was standing in the hallway of Grimmauld Place Number 12.

Tonks let go of the bear and fell backwards crashing an the floor with a loud bang.

"What is going on here? Mudbloods, half scum, traitors! In my house, what a disgrace! The Dark Lord will not be pleasant when he catches you I can tell you that!" Shrieked the voice on from the wall, apparently Tonks awoke the old painting on the wall when she fell over. " Get out of my family house you filth!"

"In case he did not inform you, he is also a half-blood and his name is Tom Marvolo Riddle, not Voldemort, Dark Lord, You-know-who or He-who-must-not-be-named. It's Riddle, so call him that!" Harry shouted at the painting "And if you ever accuse anyone in this room to be indecent in this house again I will personally burn this whole place down together with this god dam painting!"

"Yes si-ir, of-course" the picture replied. The Aurors looked strangely at Harry but didn't question what happened.

"Well what are you staring at? Go! Surely you have better things to do then gape me all day long" Harry replied picking up his things and taking them to one of the rooms upstairs.

Unfortunately he was met by a sight he certainly didn't enjoy.

"So you finally figured it out, didn't you? Harry asked completely horrified at the sight of his two friends pashing each other. "But no, you couldn't even do it somewhere private could you?"

"Oh, um, hi Harry!" Hermione said blushing deeply." What are you doing here?"

"Hey mate! Didn't expect you here this early" Ron replied.

"So this is what you have been doing all summer! Snogging! Not even "hello" or "how are you" to me!" Harry shouted "Great friends you two are!"

"Actually we couldn't write to you because Dumbledore forbidden us." Hermione replied matter of factly.

"Who cares what that idiot says? Had you wanted to you would have added a note together with Remus' letters!" Harry shouted.

"Well I suppose we. Look we are sorry, okay." Ron replied

"Sometimes sorry is just not enough!" Harry shouted.

"What do you expect us to say?" Ron asked rolling his eyes. In his opinion the worst a person could do is to stop him from spending time with his girlfriend.

Hermione forced herself to stay calm " Harry, just calm down for a minute. We need to discuss this properly with out bursting our eardrums by shouting at each other."

"Stuff you guys, I am not going to even bother fighting with you two. See you at dinner!" Harry said loudly turning away.

He walked to the library and collapsed on one of the leather chairs. He stared at the shelves full of books surrounding him, all were dusty he doubted many had time to read them. A sudden idea came to mind, the Black family were interested in Dark Arts, wouldn't they have at least a few books on the subject?

He stood up and started scanning the shelves, a few books looked vaguely interesting but something told him to keep looking. Suddenly he noticed few books on the bottom shelf had fingerprints, somebody



had recently touched them. He looked at the names " Family Trees of Noble Houses", "The History of the Founders" and "The Chronicles of Ancient Britain: King Arthur". The titles surprised Harry, they didn't seem like Dark Art books and who here would be interested in something like that anyway? He opened there was something interesting in them, but he wanted to make sure he would not be caught with them since he wasn't sure he would be allowed to even touch anything in the room and he didn't intend on asking.

He picked out a couple of other books that looked interesting. Taking the books he left the library and hid them in his room hoping to read them later.

Harry thought it was nearly time for dinner so he made his way down to the dining room. He saw it was already full of people, most of them he had not met before. Sitting down near the end of the long table he noticed Dumbledore was there too.

"Harry! You are here at last, well dinner will be ready shortly." said Mrs. Weasley hugging him gently. " Now where are Ron and Hermione I wonder?"

"Probably where I left them, pashing in one of the corridors." Harry replied bitterly." Who would have thought, I have been making bets with people since the third year that they will never get together!"

"Are you alright Harry?" Tonks asked crashing into the table as she tried to sit down." You look a bit pale."

"I didn't get my sleep tonight, my cousin was having a party. " Harry replied quickly, this was of-course a downright lie, but he didn't care. "Albus, when are our O.W.L results supposed to arrive?"

Dumbledore stared unsure of how to take the fact he was called by his first name by one of his students "Actually they should arrive today or tomorrow at the latest"

"Oh, Tonks be careful of that wine glass over to your left" Mrs. Weasley cautioned as Tonks smashed another glass full of red wine "Too late."

"Have you decided if you accept the Quidditch Captain position, Harry?" McGonagall asked taking a sip of her drink.

"Ah, just like your father! Always flying!" Mundugrus shouted out happily.

"It seems too many of you have the assumption that I am my father, maybe it's time you understood I am my own person." Harry replied coldly " No I won't accept the position, in case it has escaped your attention I have a lifetime ban on flying and I don't have my broom."

"Well, we could just ask the ministry to give it back?" Remus reasoned.

Harry paused "The ban itself is not the problem. Last year the team won the cup without me, Ginny is a perfectly capable Seeker. Obviously they do not need me, so I won't play."

"Why Harry? You like Quidditch, just like your father" Mad Eye replied.

"My father, my father! The way you talk about him you would think he was a saint!" Harry shouted "But he wasn't he was a good for nothing, selfish, stuck-up vagabond running around always endangering his friends and family!"

Snape looked shocked " Well for once we seem to agree Potter." He stated boldly.

"You just think this is hilarious, don't you Severus! Well I want to let you know something! Voldemort knows you are a traitor, so beware!" Harry cried out

"But how? I am not aware he has spies at Hogwarts." Dumbledore asked.

"What an old fool you are, of-course he knows, most likely your office is being bugged or perhaps something even worse!" Harry laughed his eyes seemed to change colour "Damn you all! The man died

because of you and this is how you repay him. By using his house like this, for your stupid social entertainment!"

No one could find any words to say so they quietly watched the Boy-who-lived leave the room incredibly upset.

"What, a prophecy?" Mr. Weasley asked, "That's something we have not heard about before."

"Something Voldemort does not need to know about" Dumbledore replied grimly "Although I doubt he know exactly what it consists of."

"You should not keep secrets from the boy like you did over the years" Snape said " He is very delicate at the moment"

Mad-eye raised an eyebrow "Severus Snape! You just sounded like you are defending the great Harry Potter. What is the world coming to?"

"Shut up, Moody!" Snape growled, " I am not defending him, I am merely stating that perhaps we shouldn't expect as much from the boy."

"Isn't that called defending?" Mad-Eye Moody laughed.

"Severus, Alastor please don't start another fight, that's the last thing we need right now" Dumbledore requested

"What is exactly is the problem?" asked one of the Aurors. "I was always told he loved flying."

"He does, he is addicted to it, just like James" McGonagall replied, "Of-course the broom will be returned any time he asks for it, but he does not seem to want it at all."

Remus looked more worried then anyone else "When I met him three years ago he seemed to be a carbon copy of James, but now he is growing less like him everyday. Even Sirius noted quite often that last year."

"I suppose the boy is right, for the last six years everyone has been comparing him to his parents, perhaps we should just realize he is a different person with a very different personality" McGonagall stated. "Well at least one thing we can't deny he does have the same sort of temper James had."

"No, James was rash and could get frustrated easily, but he didn't end up taking out his problems at anyone who crossed his path most of the time." stated one of the Aurors.

Severus snorted, "Maybe that's because he took out his anger on me?"

"Here you go, dinner served" Mrs. Weasley said happily hoping to break the tension as the last of the food appeared on the table.

"Beautiful dinner as usual, Molly" Mundugrus said, " You are one lucky man, Arthur. Seven kids, a great house and a perfect wife."

"Pity Harry has to miss out on dinner" Mrs. Weasley sighed, "He is so thin already"

"It's his fault and do try not to baby him too much he is a teenager after all." Remus said. "Let's eat for now, I'll check on him later"

## Chapter 2 – Of Proposals and New Servants

'Now my dear friend. We can talk privately' The Dark Lord said after the last of the Death Eaters left. Percy paled getting even more scared, to be alone with the dark Lord? Never in his worst nightmares had he imagined this. 'What does a wizard as powerful as you do on a simple guard duty?'

'It was a task they assigned me, I couldn't help it.' Percy replied nervously the Dark Lord's ever changing mood and personality terrified him out of his wits.

'Perhaps they do not realise the true extend of your potential.' Voldemort sulked not taking his eyes away from the red haired man 'A have a preposition for you. You join me and I will treat you as you deserve.'

Percy stumbled, is he being offered a chance to become a Death Eater? 'What about my family?'

'They don't have to know, we can keep this secret just between us two if you want.' You-know-who suggested, 'Do you accept?'

'Do I-I have a choice?' Percy said with all the courage he could master. To Percy the Dark Lord's eyes seemed to change colour and shape continuously, but maybe it was just his imagination.

'No, not really you don't' You-know-who laughed.

Percy started to retreat backwards going paler then he was a second ago.

'Don't try to ran away from me young Weasley! See this wand? This wand has killed Diggory, it had killed Bertha Jokings, it had put incalculable number of muggles out of their misery, it has made countless people suffer more then you can image, it has made many become Death Eaters! This is the very same wand that killed the Potters!' Voldemort paused as Percy banged against the other wall 'Now this wand points at you, what will you do?'

'You can't, you won't!' Percy shouted nervously

'I can't what? I am the Dark Lord, I do what I want! Now you can join me peacefully or you will suffer before you finally agree anyway.'

'No I won't' Percy panicked searching for his own wand but it was taken away from him hours ago. 'Please, don't hurt me!'

'You do as the Dark Lord wishes you to do! Even the Malfoy fool knows that! You are not Potter, he is the only one who dares to go against me!' Voldemort shouted 'Think what you are doing, your life and sanity stands on your decision!'

'No, I won't join you! I respect Dumbledore and I truly believe Harry is going to defeat you one day!' Percy shouted as loudly as he could, but even to himself the words sounded weak.

Voldemort was getting very annoyed 'Never mention the Potter brat! If think you have decided, then think again! CRUCIO!'

Percy cried from the pain, at that moment he realised just how cruel the Dark Lord really is. His whole body felt like thousands of blunt knives were etching slowly into his flesh, his bones felt like they were twisting at horrible angles yet refused to brake. Every muscle in his body was screaming with pain. The pain didn't stop for what Percy thought was years.

'Had enough yet?' You-know-who asked angrily after he lifted the curse 'Your screaming is a girl's shriek! It is disgusting to listen to and certainly not worth the effort.'

Percy didn't trust himself to say anything; he simply nodded tears flowing freely out of his eyes.

'Good, now get up and come here!' Voldemort ordered, 'Let the ceremony begin!'

Percy half-walked half-crawled to the Dark Lord's feet, he bent and kissed the floor in front of Voldemort.

'Get up!' Voldemort ordered, tearing off the sleeve of Percy's robe he started to chant several complicated incantations his wand pointed at the younger man's heart. Percy's head was filled with pain once more; although it was not as strong as a Cruciatus it came very close.

Voldemort started hissing to himself in what Percy could only assume was parseltongue as the pain in his already aching body increased. The Dark Lord stopped sharply.

'Repeat after me, no mistakes, one word wrong you die' he ordered.

'Yes sir.' Percy managed to say, his vision was going and he was getting dizzy.

'From this day forward' Voldemort said proudly

'From this day forward' Percy hated himself for saying what he did but there was nothing he could do.

'I am faithful to Lord Voldemort and him only' The Dark Lord stated loudly, to Percy it seemed he was greatly enjoying gulped:

'I am faithful to Lord Vo-vo-ol-demort and him only'

'I swear by my life and those of my family' The Dark Lord said.

"I swear by my life and those of my family" Percy finished shaking from fear.

Voldemort said the final incantation and Percy's arm exploded with pain. Through his vision was clouded he could faintly see the Dark Mark on his arm. Voldemort let go of him and Percy collapsed on the floor fainting.

Voldemort stared with remorse at his newest servant before leaving him to lie alone on the ground. Sitting down on a chair the Dark Lord took some parchment and ink from the table beside him. Sighing he wondered what he is going to write.

Looking at the ink he realised it was blue. Isn't blue the colour of Ravenclaw House or is it Hufflepuff? He couldn't quite remember, but then it was a long time ago. No blue wouldn't do, what colour should he use? Black, too plain. Green, too Slytherin, plus it's the colour used for official Hogwarts letters. Red? The colour of blood, one of his favourite colours and Gryffindor House colour, perfect.

Casting a swift spell the ink changed to dark red. This meant he was now free he returned to the original problem of what exactly to write.

Finally he decided to write a draft first then see what he needs to change. To Voldemort's dismay he went through about a dozen parchments before he was satisfied with the results. In Voldemort's opinion the letter was too much trouble, maybe the next time, if there is a next time of-course he would get one of the Death Eaters to write it. Yes, Weasley's first mission will be to act as the official scribe for the Dark Lord.

In the Owlery he didn't have quite as much trouble, all the owls he had at his service were completely black with green eyes so he merely picked the closest one to him at the time.

'Go to Potter and make sure he gets it while he is alone. And don't hang around, leave straight after he gets it' The Dark Lord ordered to the owl.

Oh god what am I doing? He still couldn't believe he was sending a letter to his worst enemy.

Sighing he strolled around the many corridors of the large house. It was always empty, no matter how many people there were present. What it really needed is some laughter, something his Death Eaters couldn't ever provide. Yes, they could laugh if he ordered them to, but their laughter would be fake and empty. The only thing that would really make the house beautiful were not the expensive furniture or the chandeliers or the Persian carpets, it would be children. Laughing happy children, something he hated and loved. "What are you thinking Tom? Don't tell me you are lonely?" asked a cold voice in his head.



Oh just shut up! Tom thought.

Harry went up to his room once more nonetheless still very irritated he picked up one of the books from the library and started to leaf through it.

Most of the book was full of tiny, spidery looking text that looked of little interest to Harry. But in the middle he noticed were four long family trees. On the top of each were the names of the Four Founders of Hogwarts. He did not bother to even look at the Slytherin line, he already knew the only living descendant of Salazar. The Ravenclaw line seemed to have split in half one side ending abruptly somewhere during the middle ages the other as Harry read from a small footnote was full of squibs and eventually become muggle disappearing without a trace from the magical world. The Hufflepuff line seemed to have several descendants at the present time but the only one he was familiar with was Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic.

The last line Harry was a bit nervous of looking at, it was his schoolhouse after all. He looked down the line confused by the last name Godric's descendants had. It wavered down to only one man - James Potter. Harry blinked and checked the date of the publishing; it was a few decades out dated.

So if his father was dead, then Harry himself was the heir of Gryffindor. No way! It could be another James Potter, Potter was a common name after all. Yes, in the Muggle world, not in the Wizard one, Harry thought. In truth he had never heard of anyone except his family with last name Potter in the Magical World.

For the time being he decided to accept the fact that he was Godric's Heir. He thought about it for the moment before admitting to himself that in fact he wasn't at all surprised. It just seemed to fit all too well, the sword in the Chamber of Secrets, the gold and red sparks, Fawkes coming to him and how many times people said that the staircases appeared to listen to his thoughts and wishes.

And it would explain why he just happened to be on the top of Voldemort's death list. Yes, there was the prophecy but to Harry it

seemed there must have been some other reason why he just happened to be the right person apart from it being the simple turn of fate.

If he was the Heir of Griyfindor that would explain the amount of money his parents had, after all the account he was using all those years was only for when he was at school, there were many other piles of gold and silver in other accounts in Gringotts that much Harry knew for sure. All fit too well.

Throwing the first book on the bed he picked up the other two.

'What the? What would King Arthur have to do with everything else?' Harry said out loud. He found several references to Arthur, Merlin, Guinevere and surprisingly Godric Gryffindor. One particular part caught his attention.

King Arthur had only one child, a son. Of that child the line continued up to King Godric. Yet when it was his turn to take the throne many wizards the so-called "Wizard Council" of the time opposed by then ancient royal line for the day's standards. Godric of-course did not deem their thoughts of great importance as these traitors had killed his father and older brother.

He however never enjoyed the thought of ruling and as he had no heir or family at the time he thought the rebels would assassinate him in the attempts to get the throne for themselves. Having little wish to die for something he didn't want in the first place, he agreed willingly to abandon the throne. He offered it to the Wizard Council who jumped at the opportunity.

Yet they was not done lightly, Godric had asked that if one of his descendants desired to claim the throne once more or wished to change the leadership in general, they must comply immediately. He had also asked for unlimited money and resources to built his dream castle. Together with his dearest friends Salazar, Helga and Rowena they achieved the task and opened one of the first magical schools in the world.

This startled Harry, not only he was the heir of Griffondor but also the the possible king of Magical Britain? From what he could remember the Wizard Council was merely an earlier name for the Ministly of Magic. He could just throw Fudge away and put Dumbledore or somebody to govern Wizarding Britain! No one would dare to argue with him.

He still had a few questions he wanted answered so he continued reading.

To protect his descendants Godric changed his last name to Potter, a very common muggle name to hopefully hide the family's origins. It is very much possible that the descendants of Godric are not aware of their royal status or their ownship of Hogwarts.

Too true, too true indeed Harry thought. And he partially owned Hogwarts, well probably most of it since it was Godric's money that helped built it, explains the stair thing. So now he knew the truth, what to do now?

Somebody knocked on the door 'Harry? I want to talk to you' Remus said.

'Alright, alright just wait a second!' Harry replied stuffing the books underneath the bed. 'Come in!'

'How are you doing?' Remus asked walking in 'You were pretty angry at dinner'

'I am okay I suppose' Harry said 'Ah, I overreacted to a few things that's all. It doesn't really matter'

'You upset quite a few people today, that matters. Maybe we can talk about it.'

'No, I don't want to, I'll just get angry again and upset you even more' Harry replied 'I don't like getting angry even if I do, do it pretty often.'

'As you wish, just so you know, talking helps' Remus stated kindly.

Harry took a deep breath 'What would you have me talk about?'

'Sirius for once, then Ron and Hermione, the prophecy, anything else that is troubling you. I am here to listen.'

Harry was getting tired of this pointless conversation, but Remus was too stubborn, maybe it's time for a direct statement Harry thought

'You will find your time wasted then because I don't want to talk about it now. Please, I want to get to sleep, hopefully a decent one this time.' Harry said annoyed.

'Your choice. By the way your test results have arrived not long ago, they haven't been open so don't worry about that.' Remus replied wearily throwing an envelope to Harry.

Harry waited until the werewolf left the room before opening the letter. He read it briefly, well he passed everything even Divination was Acceptable, not that it mattered. He actually got Exceeds Expectations in Astronomy? That's something he never thought possible after what happened during the exam. And Acceptable in History, after he fell asleep during the test? Maybe he is a better student then he thought.

Yes just like he thought, Outstanding in Defence Against the Dark Arts, but the most surprising thing was he got an Outstanding in Potions, which surprised him greatly, so far he could still follow his dream of becoming an Auror.

Harry was slightly alarmed by a strange movement outside the window; he could barely see it out of the corner of his eye. Taking out his wand he opened the window and let out a relieved laugh. He was getting paranoid; probably he is going to end up like Mad Eye Moody, afraid of everything. It was only a owl and since it was completely black coloured, it was hard to see. The owl flew inside the room making Hedwig hoot loudly.

Harry took off the letter it was carrying letting the owl left immediately.

The letter was written on a thick, slightly reddish parchment which was definitely expensive. Harry did not like the fact that it was written in bright red ink. He unfolded the letter and stared at it.

Dear Harry,

Although we have not been the deepest of friends lately I wish to talk to you. It has been remarked a lot that we are much alike and perhaps those who are so comparable should stick together.

You offer me something that I wished to achieve for many years, something you do not wish in any case, I believe you know what I am talking about. In return I offer you anything you desire plus a chance to make sure to the world that it understands; you are your own person and not a mere extension of your parents.

If you wish I can teach you a lot of things you are not taught at Hogwarts.

Respectfully yours,  
Lord Slytherin

What is this? Completely in awe Harry stared at the letter for a long time before throwing it down and stretching out on the bed. Voldemort is actually trying to make peace, that's definitely going on Harry's "I never thought it would happen list".

Unsure of what to think he tried to get the letter out of his mind at least until morning. He forced himself to get to sleep hoping for no nightmares. Slumber came slowly as he was still upset and angry at what happened earlier that night.

Eventually he dropped to sleep only to see the latest recount of his godfather's death.

### Chapter 3 – Of Shopping and Feasts

"Harry you were screaming last night again." Hermione stated sitting on Ron's lap as they ate breakfast from one large bowl full of cereal "Are you all right?"

"I am fine." Harry replied.

It was over a week since he came to the Grimmauld Place but he still couldn't get used to the two of his friends constantly kissing each other. Yes of-course he did have another nightmare and most likely he did scream while it lasted, but he couldn't remember anything about it except the fact that Voldemort was in it. Not that it helped much. Plus the blasted letter was still confusing him completely, it was a week since he received it and he still had no idea what to think of it.

"Uh, Mrs. Weasley we still need to get our school supplies for this year." Hermione said "Maybe we can go to Diagon Alley sometime this week."

"Actually we are going today. I didn't say anything before as I wasn't sure Dumbledore was going to allow you to come this year until very late yesterday evening." Remus replied.

"Are there any particular places you like to visit apart from the usual stores?" Mrs. Weasley asked

Harry thought about it for the moment before replying "I need to go to a few Muggle shops as well, alone if possible."

"Oh, alone are you sure?" Moody asked, "You won't be safe."

"If anything happens I can protect my-self, it's not like I have never done it before." Harry replied grimly. Something told the rest that they were in for a bad fight if they dared to argue; slowly they decided to let Harry have his way.

"Well let's go then," Moody said as everyone finished breakfast and got changed." We'll use Floo Powder since the ministry is covering for us anyway."

The group nodded and one by one stepped into the fireplace in the living room. Soon to Harry's frustration the Weasleys, Hermione, Remus and at least eight Aurors were standing in the Leaky Cauldron.

"Let's go, I suppose Gringotts first." Tonks asked as she was one of their guards.

They walked into the wizarding bank, which was as usual full of goblins. Harry broke away from the group and walked up to one of the goblins that was free.

"What can I do for you?" the goblin asked

"I need to collect some money from my school account and I also need to see the other accounts in my family's possession." Harry asked hoping not to be missed for a while at least.

"Of-course Mr. Potter. Your key please?" the goblin replied. Harry did not bother to find out how the goblin knew his name and simply handed him the key.

"Follow me, Mr. Potter." The goblin ordered. Harry followed the goblin through the cold stone passage to the cart. They soon sped off through the confusing maze of the underground passages.

"Here you are, your personal vault," the goblin said.

Harry opened the heavy door, there were now more gold and silver than before. He didn't know where it came from so he made a note in his head to ask someone about it later. He quickly stuffed large handfuls of coins in his bag and left the room.

Returning to the cart they made their way around several more tunnels so fast Harry was starting to get sick. Eventually they stopped on the edge of what looked like an island in the middle of a maze of pathways.

"Here you are Mr. Potter. From 802 to 806 all yours" the goblin said, "You are the only one who can open them."

Harry nodded and jumped out of the cart. He strode to the front door of 802; it was a thick metal door with no keyhole or door handle. Harry simply pushed the door, as he couldn't think of what else to do. As it opened it revealed more gold, silver and bronze than Harry has ever imagined. The size of the vault was so huge he couldn't see the other end of it, all around him the money was piled up in large mounds some almost reaching the twenty feet high ceiling. Harry was completely startled. He knew he was rich, but not this rich.

"What's in the others?" he asked the goblin after a minute or so.

"803 to 805 are mainly money. 806 has jewels and heirlooms." The goblin replied in a bored tone.

Harry made his way to the last vault eager to find out what kind of heirlooms were inside. Once again the door simply opened as it was pushed. Within the room were also piles upon piles of rubies, emeralds, sapphires, diamonds and many other precious stones. The room seemed as large as the one before, but with one difference. The room was parted down the middle, at the back of it stood a large heavy looking wooden table with several boxes on top of it.

Harry opened one of the boxes revealing two golden rings with huge gems set in each one, he assumed they were someone's wedding rings or something of that kind. Opening another box he also saw more expensive jewellery.

The last however contained what Harry really wanted, a single golden ring with a giant ruby on it, the design was much like Godric's sword. Harry checked the inside of the ring just to make sure, it was encrypted Godric Gryffindor in small delicate writing. This is it Harry thought, his Heirloom.

Snatching the ring he walked out of the room closing the door behind him. He got into the cart once more.



"I need to exchange some money into pounds," Harry said to the goblin as they raced back to the main hall of the bank.

"Of-course sir." The goblin replied.

The rest of the journey went in silence as Harry kept staring at the ring and turning it gently. Soon the goblin exchanged half of Harry's money into Muggle currency and Harry was ready to go shopping outside of Diagon Alley.

"Harry! Where have you been?" He heard Remus shout from behind him. Harry turned hiding the ring, which he was still holding in his hand and swore under his breath.

"I sorda lost you and I thought it might be better to get all the important things done first and then look for you." Harry replied as silkily as he could

"Don't ever do that again! We were sick with worry!" Mrs. Weasley said. Harry noticed Hermione was leaning on Ron with her arm around his shoulder, a style of walking they adapted of late. They didn't seem to miss him at all.

"You didn't have to worry, I was just getting the money out of my account." Harry said " How about I meet you in a few hours at the Leaky Cauldron, I have to go to the muggle shopping centre."

"But you won't be safe!" Ginny said loudly, sounding exactly like her mother.

Harry didn't realise she was even there until then, he sighed "We have decided it already, I am going whether you want it or not."

"You pick Harry." Mad Eye moody replied. "If you are not in the Leaky Cauldron in three hours we are going to look for you, understand?"

"Sure, Alastor." Harry stated calmly. Moody groaned, Dumbledore was the only one who he allowed to call him by his first name.

"Be careful dear, make sure you don't get lost." Mrs. Weasley said.

"Don't worry, I won't run in front of a car and I know London as well as anyone can." Harry lied, he had only been in London, a few times and he never stayed there for long.

Not saying good-bye he made his way to the bar and out to Muggle side of the city. Somehow he felt more at home with the loud honking of cars and many shoppers laughing and joking. He found the nearest optometrist (it was only two streets away).

"Can I help you sir?" the worker in the store asked.

"Yes, I was wondering if I could get contacts instead of glasses." Harry replied.

The woman asked him more questions but eventually he left with a new pair of glasses and some contact lenses. Harry then decided it was time for a haircut too. He soon found himself with a much shorter haircut, his hair spiked and his scar completely revealed.

Now he fought he was ready for the final, he walked in a large shopping centre at the end of the street in hope of buying some new clothes since he didn't think it was stylish to wear Dudley's old ones all the time. Surprisingly the assistants at the stores were very eager to help him in his selections so within a hour he walked away with pretty much a complete new wardrobe.

He couldn't help but smile at the look on every body's faces when they are going to see him; he was now wearing new shiny, black jeans and a matching dark shirt.

As he walked into the leaky Cauldron once more very much everyone in the bar at the time stared at him.

"Harry Potter?" asked one of the wizards at the side tables "It is a pleasure to meet you!"

There was loud muttering coming from every side around Harry, a few people stood up and shook his hand. Although Harry didn't enjoy this kind of attention he was relieved they didn't think of him as a liar

any longer. Soon enough Tom begged the crowd to calm down and they returned to their seats though still talking excitedly.

"Well, you were close my boy." Mundugrus smiled "Two hours fifty-eight minutes."

"You look, um, different Harry." Ginny asked " But bloody hell, you look good."

"Ginny!" Mrs. Weasley exclaimed "You are a girl, don't say such foul things!"

"Thank- you Ginny." Harry said blushing slightly. "Alright I have a few more things to do at the Alley, I'll be back. Hopefully sooner this time."

"Oh. Don't worry Harry we already got you your school things for this year." Tonks said.

"It's not for school." Harry replied shortly.

He left the group yet again rolling his eyes as another pair of girls giggled as he went past. He headed straight for Florish and Botts. He picked out a few books he wanted for a while mostly on Dark Arts although one or two ended up being on history.

"Interesting selection, Mr. Potter." Said the man at the counter.

"It pays well to be prepared, you know with the Dark Lord's return and things as such. I think he might still try and kill me, even after all these years, he can be such a fool sometimes." Harry replied laughing at the look the man gave him. Harry handed him over the money, several galleons more than the actual price. "Here you go, keep the change and try to be quiet."

Harry got himself a few extra robes, all black as usual, with large hoods. He afterward made his way down to Knockturn Alley looking around in case somebody was watching him. He quickly found what he needed there, a shop that sold weapons and illegal wands.

There was only one skeletal looking man in the shop, he half-squealed when he talked " Can I help you?"

"Yes you can, I need a wand.' Harry replied nervously.

"You are not planning to register it, are you?" the man asked showing Harry a few that were on display.

Harry smiled evilly "No, that would spoil the fun."

The man took out a number of different wands. At the end Harry chose a small wand made of dark wood, it was not as good as the wand made by Olivander, but it would do the job. Harry left the store after giving the man a large bribe so he would not utter a word of their meeting, satisfied. He hid the wand and returned to Diagon Alley. Thinking it was better to pretend to look innocent he quickly got himself an ice-cream and walked out of the Alley to meet his "friends".

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The rest of the holidays went quickly and Harry spent most of the time in his room coming out only to eat twice a day or to run. As he had taken a habit off every morning before anyone else in the house woke up. He really hated being in the house, since it reminded him of Sirius, whom he forced himself not to think about.

The nightmares were becoming less frequent which was something Harry was still confused about but he still couldn't sleep properly so he had taken to wondering around the house at night. Of-course the letter continued to bother Harry every time he remembered it. He hadn't told anyone about it as he was sure to receive a long lecture about how he shouldn't have even opened it and he was being tricked again.

Today however Harry was happier this was the last time he would see the house for a long time since today was the beginning of the new school year. He packed last night and was now sitting eating his breakfast as Ron, Hermione and Ginny struggled to find the last for their belongings that were scattered around the house. Why they

were thrown around everywhere no one really knew but Harry was laughing hysterically for half an hour as Ron was trying to get his underwear from one of the lamps on the ceiling. Sooner or later of-course the teenagers found most of their things and were promised that the rest would be sent to them as they were recovered.

They were taken to Kings Cross with the usual guard in two ministry cars and several people on motorcycles around them. To Harry it seemed way too much, but as no one listened to he complains, so he eventually settled down still feeling like a he was being treated like baby.

"So Harry, ready for your new year at Hogwarts?" asked Tonks from the front seat.

"As ready as I need to be. " Harry groaned. Ron and Hermione were sitting next to him pashing constantly. "Something bad happens every year anyway."

Tonks rolled her eyes "Don't be so pessimistic, you are starting to sound like Mad Eye."

Harry couldn't help but smile "Better mad Eye then Dumbledore, he is always going around knowing everything but not telling anyone."

Tonks didn't reply and was quiet the rest of the way to London and when they got onto the train.

"Hey guys!" Neville shouted entering their cabin soon after they train set off "Can I sit here?"

"Of-course, as long as you don't mind the two lovers and pissed off Harry." Ginny stated cheerfully.

"Hi Harry. Are you okay?" Neville asked sitting down next to Ginny. " Looks like Ron and Hermione finally figured it, huh?"

"Yeah, looks like it." Harry replied not looking away from the book he was reading. "I am fine, thank-you."

Neville raised an eyebrow but didn't pester Harry anymore instead turning to Ginny.

"Have you seen Luna?" he asked

"No, maybe she is just late to return from her trip or something." Ginny replied

The conversation continued as Harry was glued to his book; Ron and Hermione were too taken with each other to pay any attention to others. The witch with the trolley came and went as Harry brought a few sweets for himself and quickly returned to his book.

The rest of the journey went very much smoothly as even Draco did not uphold the tradition of barging into their cabin and starting a fight. They got off at Hogsmeade train stop and sat down into carriages before anyone realised Harry was not wearing a uniform.

"Did you forget to change?" Neville asked.

Harry was wearing dirty looking black leather pants and a black t-shirt with words "Fuck off you asshole" on the front of it. Harry put on his heavy leather jacket and didn't reply. Neville looked at Ginny who shrugged as confused as he was. When they entered the castle most of the school was staring at Harry but he didn't see them or at least pretended he didn't. They sat down at the usual spots at the head of the table.

"Harry, what are you wearing?" asked one of the older kids  
"McGonagall is going to kill you!"

"I am wearing what I want to wear and she can't kill me or the Dark lord is going to take over the world." Harry replied while waving and smiling sarcastically at the Slytherins staring at him.

The hat sang a song of usual length this year not like a year ago and the First years were all sorted into houses as it has been done for the last thousand years.

Dumbledore stood up for his traditional speech "Welcome to another year at Hogwarts! Please note that the Forbidden Forest, is Forbidden, some of the sixth years should try to remember that" he paused looking at Harry "Our new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher will be announced shortly. There is a Quidditch Cup this year and the rules are as usual. Now please, begin the feast!"

Large piles of food appeared on the tables everything from chicken and pork to mint pasties and Pumpkin Juice. Harry ate a little and kept looking around, he was not surprised when Professor McGonagall stood up and made her way to where Harry was sitting.

"Harry what do you think are you doing?" Hermione whispered as she saw the teacher coming.

"The headmaster wants to speak to you after the feast." McGonagall stated.

Harry frowned "If the old bum wants to talk so badly, he should come here himself, not send one of his pussy cats after me."

"You will stay back after the feast." McGonagall said and walked off.

"Harry, what was that for?" Hermione asked genuinely concerned.

"Yeah, I mean wow mate. You insulted McGonagall and Dumbledore in one sentence, but why?" Ron asked.

"Cause I feel like it." Harry replied shortly.

The exchange just happened to be loud enough for the whole school to hear so most of the students eagerly awaited the end of the feast keen to hear more. While most of the younger years left the hall immediately the older kids stayed back to see what would happen next.

"Sir." Harry said simply bowing slightly.

"Perhaps you wish to explain your behaviour tonight?" Dumbledore asked quietly.

Harry turned back to the people still watching before replying "Pardon me, it wasn't wise. As for the uniform, I was reading and I completely forgot about it." Harry replied smoothly.

"If you say so." Dumbledore said casting a curious glance at Harry's shirt. "You are proving to be quite the opposite of your father."

"Should I take that as a compliment?" Harry smirked; he couldn't believe it he had just gotten away with a lie in front of Dumbledore.

"Take it as you want."

"I got a question for you." Harry gathered his courage " Who is the new professor?"

Dumbledore smiled " Tonks will be teaching the junior years, I will be taking the seniors."

Harry nodded and walked off. At the doors to the hall he walked past the watching who give him evil looks. Dumbledore and Harry kept their voices low on purpose so no one could hear them, especially not on the other side of the hall.

Harry sighed and walked up the marble staircase. A sudden idea came to mind stepping on one of the smaller staircases Harry desperately thought To the Astronomy Tower. To his surprise the stairs changed course and carried him upwards like an elevator would. The stairs did indeed take him to the very top of the highest tower of Hogwarts. Harry peeked over the edge; it was more than a hundred metres down, a definite death to all who fell of the side. Harry smiled; sometimes he really wished he were dead, quite often actually. Lost deep in thought he looked at the land below in wonder before he was interrupted.

Another large black owl was flying towards the castle. He could barely see the outline of it, but somehow he realized whom it most likely is for. He raised his arm for the owl to land on which it



graciously accepted. Harry untied the string holding the letter and the owl flew off immediately.

Harry slowly unfolded the letter once again on the same expensive parchment and written in red ink. He read it carefully holding his breath. If this was meant to help him somehow it wasn't doing its job certainly in fact he was now only more confused of what to do. Figuring to just return to the dormitory, he walked down to the seventh floor only to realize he didn't know the password.

"Let me in." He ordered.

"Do you have the password?" The Fat Lady asked yawning "Can't let you in without it."

Harry groaned "Come on, I have been in this school for five years now, you have to remember me by now!"

"How do I know you are now using the Polyjuice potion or something of that kind?" The Fat Lady asked.

"Look, in my third year Sirius Black tried to enter the Common Room and slashed your painting to pieces. A year later on Halloween I became the school champion and your friend Viv told you the news before I even reached you." Harry said angrily.

Fat lady looked thoughtful but said "Not good enough."

"Fine! See this?" Harry shouted taking the ring out of his pocket "This used to be Godric's ring, now it's mine! I am the Heir of Gryffindor and I order you to let me in!"

The fat Lady stared "Yes, my lord." She said bowing.

Harry walked into the Common Room putting the ring back in his pocket.

"Hey, I could get used to this" Harry said smiling to himself.

He walked up to his room and froze for a second. On the top of his bed lay his racing broom; there was no note to it or anything. Harry picked it up very carefully; it was exactly like he remembered sleek, polished and shiny. He felt a burning sensation in his chest, no he couldn't fly any more, and it just didn't feel right any longer. Harry felt tears starting to form in his eyes, why did they return it to him? He didn't want it, Sirius give it to him. Sirius was now dead; because of him he didn't deserve to fly. He hated the broom, he also loved it dearly, it was one of the few things he had of Godfather. Why did he have to leave? Sirius was he only true family and now even he was gone.

Collapsing onto the bed he tried as hard as he could not to cry, but tears fell one by one. He wished he could just break the broom but his hands refused. Finally he dropped the broom and rolling into a ball forced him-self to sleep.

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Lia: Don't actually speak French much, but I sort of understood it anyway. Thanks for reviewing.

Slimpun: Very good arguments, for one and two I suppose I can answer only with 'All can be forgiven'. For three, he won't be staying in the Black house forever. As for the rest, I don't think Harry is even thinking straight at this point. Ah well, you'll see what happens.

Capn-BlackRose and Henio: Your update is here, a week earlier then I thought it would be, but I have nothing to do so yeah.

## Chapter 4 – Of Voices and Arguments

Harry lay on his bed with his eyes wide open. It was still very early but he doubted he would get any more sleep. Hoping not to be able to recount the horror of what he had just witnessed he tried to assess the circumstances. There were only a few things that came to his mind; a green flash and a scream of a terrified child.

Harry forced himself to think if he could remember anything about the young girl. He shuddered as he realised he remembered the name - Jung Chang, Cho's cousin. He had heard Cho mention her once last year.

He stumbled while getting out of his bed making Ron open his eyes for a second.

"Are you all right mate?" Ron mumbled before getting back to sleep. It seemed to Harry that Ron had been saying that so much more often than anything else that is at the times that he was not kissing Hermione, nevertheless he didn't bother to really find out what Harry was feeling. Harry could only envy his friend, a loving family, good marks, and place on a Quidditch team, a girlfriend.

Harry's scar was still burning like a fresh wound would, but at the present time Harry didn't care, it had happened before and it will happen again. He quickly got dressed not bothering to comb his hair. Harry left the dormitory as quietly as he could. He carefully sat down in front of the fireplace. He dimly stared at it not registering it in his mind. Out of the depths of his pockets he drew out a small piece of crumpled, slightly worn parchment. There was a clean tidy writing on one side of it in blood red ink. Harry read it slowly, he had only read it once before, but he remembered the message inside it almost word by word.

Dear Harry,

I truly hope you will be kind enough to read this. I realise we have never been very close friends, yet I still wish you nothing but the best.

Firstly I would like to apologize to you for my behavior last year, it was less than considerate after what how the ministry and general wizarding population was acting towards you and your friends.

Secondly I wish to extend an offer for you to join my new master against the fight of all wrong doings. I can assure you the terms are very pleasant. And if you wish to you can learn all three is to know from the master himself.

Please do not merely reject it, think and perhaps reconsider how has your present life treated you. With my master your life can be a lot more pleasant. I understand you have had these offers before, but please think again about your decision.

Percy

Harry was confused about the whole offer and about Percy himself. Had he written a letter at his own thought or by force? Was this a trap or a serious offer of peace? Strange thoughts kept creeping up in his head over the last two weeks.

Yet Percy was right, what had Hogwarts ever gotten him? A dead friend and a murdered Godfather. Voldemort was right, there is no good or evil but power and those too weak to seek it. And he wanted that power. If he was right, then he had the chance to be the most powerful wizard of his time, to rival even the powers of Merlin. He cannot learn his true power by hiding behind deep walls of the castle nor could he learn the true Dark Arts without seeing or trying them first hand. Perhaps Hogwarts was not the right place to be, every time something goes wrong he was blamed even if he had proved himself countless times before.

"To know Dark Arts is to learn to defend yourself against them too, to have the power is everything", for a second Harry's Slytherin side took over his mind. But it would be dangerous, too dangerous perhaps. It might mean becoming like Voldemort himself Harry thought.

"Are you afraid?" Said the little voice of his Slytherin part inside his head " You shouldn't be, you are a Gryffindor." stated the voice

sarcastically. Yes, he was a Gryffindor; he was not going to be afraid. This was where the two completely different sides of his personality agreed, such events did not happen very often so Harry was still very much unconvinced.

He stared at the fireplace once more, maybe he was going mad? Yes, he is thinking of leaving the safety of the school, but then to his knowledge, hearing voices inside his head was not something that should happen in any case

In the window on the side of the Common Room, faint light had started to shine; soon it would be sunrise. He doubted anyone would wake for a few hours yet since it was a weekend straight after the start of the year feast. Harry was very thankful that the lessons would not begin until Monday leaving him with more time to ponder about his decision.

He made his way out of the Gryffindor Common room merely wandering around the castle, he was surprised he did not meet any teachers. Eventually he found himself outside the school kitchens. Having no particular wish of where else to go he tickled the pear. Inside he was met by warm smells of large amounts of food cooking. The house elves were running most holding large trays overfilled with food. No one paid any attention to Harry, for the first time he realized why Hermione pitied them. To work in such early hours of the morning, is certainly not particularly pleasant.

He walked right into the heart of the room before any of the house elves noticed another person in the room.

"Master Harry what might you be doing here at this time?" Dobby squeaked out almost dropping his much too large tray filled with pancakes.

"I wouldn't mind some breakfast I suppose" said Harry uncertainly, there was just something about being in a room surrounded by magical creatures that made him uncomfortable " If it all right, I don't won't to trouble you."

Dobby immediately rushed to find Harry some food "Of course sir, Dobby never minds to help Mister Harry"

In a matter of seconds Harry was handed a plate filled with different types of food and some pumpkin juice. He sat down to eat at one of the side tables slowly picking on his breakfast. Truthfully he wasn't hungry at all, he had too many things on his mind and his stomach still had not come to terms with the snapshots of the nightmare he had witnessed.

"Is there something wrong with the food sir?" Dobby squeaked from behind Harry making him jump.

"Oh, it's you Dobby. No, the food is perfectly fine, it just me." Harry replied grimly, how much could the house-elf understand of his problems?

"Tell Dobby, Dobby will try to help" the house-elf squeaked hopefully.

"It's a bit complicated Dobby." He said but decided to continue taking one look at the elf's disappointed face " If I agree then probably every one will think I am a traitor but if I don't then, then I might never get my chance to finish what I had began."

Dobby looked unsure " Please don't leave me, don't leave Hogwarts, it is your home"

Harry grinned miserably, trust the elf to come up with something Harry had forgotten, yes he himself said the same thing to Dobby four years ago " It used to be, but not anymore. Too many things have changed over the years; I have nothing to lose. I am like a third wheel between my friends, the school turns against me at every opportunity, I can't even enjoy flying anymore"

"That is not true, master. You have Dobby and Winky. Professor Dumbledore loves you as his own grandson, you have a lot of friends." Dobby piped in his eyes wide.

"Perhaps you are right, I will think about it. Can I take the breakfast upstairs?" Harry got up even more bothered and perplexed that he

was a minute before. Dobby nodded, helping Harry to collect the uneaten food " Can you give me a small knife, I'll need to cut the bread." Harry asked

Picking up his breakfast Harry went up to the Room of Requirement. As he walked in he briefly chuckled at the punching bag hanging from the ceiling and a few book on psychology lying around. He sat at the table unhurriedly buttering the bread; his gaze fell on the large knife sitting on the bench.

"Yes that would be really great, your problems gone forever, not having to worry about your marks or friends or winning or Voldemort. So bloody easy" said a high cold voice inside his head, Harry considered it for a moment, before his head suddenly felt like it was about to explode.

"Avada Kedavra!" heard as the image of a young man falling on the ground flashed inside his head. He knew what happened, but he was confused by the suddenness of it and the fact that there no torture or laughter before hand. What did Voldemort do and why?

Walking up to the punching bag he made sure his fist had connected the bag as hard as he possibly could. He kept punching it few a few minutes before giving up, it was meant to relieve stress but in stead this was merely aggravating. Sighing he left the room forgetting his meal completely as he took the knife and wrapped it in a handkerchief, it was only small so it fit perfectly in his pocket. He hoped to be left alone while wondering around the castle but unfortunately he was not so lucky as to be granted his wish.

"Do you what to go and play Quidditch?" he heard a usually mysterious voice now eager and happy." I got a spare broom with me".

Swallowing as much of his anger as possible" No thanks Luna; I am still banned from flying. I better go find Ron and Hermione" He lied hoping not to sound as annoyed as truly he was.

"Well can I just hang around you for a few minutes until Cho catches up?" Luna asked.

"I suppose it alright" Harry mumbled staring at the ground. He had not spoken to Cho since last year and he would probably have to tell someone about Jung, he really hoped no one would think about questioning him about the murder but knew against it. Dumbledore would not forget something of this kind. A few uncomfortable minutes passed as Harry went to no trouble to keep the conversation going and replied to Luna's questions with one or two word answers.

"Was happened?" Luna called out loudly unnerved by Cho's tear stricken face.

Harry was disgusted, was she still bellowing over that Diggory fool? He was not that cute, was he?

"It's Yung!" Cho muttered half drowned in her own tears" She, she..."

"What is it, Cho?" Luna asked looking genuinely concerned, which greatly surprised Harry.

"Stop wailing like a two year old Cho and tell what the hell happened" Harry ordered flatly. It was then that Cho had first noticed the boy standing of the side of the corridor starring at the two girls with a completely revolted expression.

"How can you be so mean Harry? I thought you were nicer then that." Luna said back to her usual not caring tone.

"You freak'n bastard what the hell are you doing here!!" Cho screamed all of a sudden making the ceiling shake.

Harry snorted "I an orphan, not a bastard. I can assure you my parents were married. As for what I am doing here, I happen to attend this school, in case you have not noticed yet." he retorted bluntly turning to leave.



Luna could not help but to laugh softly behind Cho's back." You a real arsehole! Selfish, stuck up peace of shit! It your fault she is dead!" Cho cried, tears starting to fall even faster than usual.

"How about you just quit your whinning whine and explain calmly. If it my fault how ever it is that is dead, then you killed my Godfather!" Harry stated his voice shaking slightly at the mention of Sirius. Cho mumbled a long string of insults without taking a breath making Luna gasp in horror." If that's the best you can come up with then I have seriously misjudged you." Harry said pretending to look disappointed.

"Why do you have to be so bloody cruel!" Cho screamed " I tried to be nice to you, but no you are such a stuck up brat it's impossible to like you!"

Fuck off Cho, I have my own problems!" Harry shouted finally losing his temper. " You have no idea about my life, no one does!"

Harry considered drawing his wand but decided against it preferring to merely leave the two girls behind whilst he walked off making sure his every foot step sounded flat and final.

He was seriously pissed off now and the situation was not helped by Peeves throwing freezing cold water on top of him as he turned a corner leading into one of the main corridors.

He was completely aghast when he saw Ron and Hermione walking down the corridor their hands on each other's shoulders, talking to each other perfectly happy, Harry tried to get away not wanting to have another fight with his so-called mates. To his dismay they have already spotted him.

"Harry, where have you been?" Hermione said leaning on Ron, laughing as if drunk.

"Around" he mumbled shortly, eager to be anywhere but there. Hermione studied the boy slowly noting his swollen, red eyes, limp hair and thin, horribly starved appearance.

She noted to herself to talk about his eating and sleeping habits, in truth she was deeply worried about her friend, but he seemed to have been avoiding them lately.

"Lets go and have some breakfast," stated Ron breaking the silence. Harry groaned but followed them, there was nothing else to do anyway. He dragged himself behind the other two, still unsure how to react to their constant snogging and laughter.

He collapsed at a bench on the other side of Ron and Hermione, soon he had regretted that decision as he had to constantly witness Ron and Hermione exchanging saliva instead of having breakfast.

The situation was not helped as Harry felt a hot spoonful of porridge hit his back. He turned around ready to punch who ever it was that threw the food.

"What do you want Malfoy?" Harry questioned loudly, the blonde boy laughing like mad from the Hufflepuff table" You are a Slytherin what are you doing sitting there?"

"Potter, calm down!" Snape groaned from the Teacher's table. Both Draco and Harry ignored the professor.

"I suppose Potter doesn't like porridge? He is more used to eating dung, porridge seems too royal for him!" Draco shouted making the whole hall stare at him.

"Shut up and leave me alone! By the way, say hi to your daddy sometime, ask him if he want to get a few pointers at being a Death Eater, 'cause I would make a better one than he will ever be!" Harry shouted back.

"Right, I'll pass on the message!" Draco snorted and left Harry in the middle of the hall.

"Not so fast you idiot! I have not finished" Harry shouted, waiting for Malfoy to turn around he punched Draco in the face.

"What do you think you are doing!" Snape shouted "Hundred points from Gryffindor "

Harry shrugged as he was already charming the porridge off. He sat back down muttering numerous curses mainly directed at Snape or Malfoy.

"We are going to the lake Harry, come on." Hermione said smiling after about half an hour of pashing Ron in the hall. Rolling his eyes, he followed them through he would have been much rather to go do something else.

It was a bright sunny day, Hogwarts castle was filled with sunlight, it was still warm. Most students were relaxing either inside or have come to enjoy the sunshine like Hermione and Ron.

"Who do you think will be the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher this year? Ron asked between the kissing " Who ever it is he wasn't at the feast yesterday"

"I am sure Dumbledore will choose an appropriate person" Hermione said matter-of-factly.

"Yeah Hermione what ever you say, I bet the new teacher will be dead by the end of the year" Harry replied for a second breaking his thoughts about how crap his life and how easy it would be to kill himself. He looked out at the edge of the lake and its deep waters. " Maybe I could go for a swim"

"You are joking right? The water is freezing at any time of the year and you can't swim anyway" Hermione stated mildly concerned. "You'll freeze to death or drown."

Maybe that's the point Harry thought." Shut up" he said, still hopefully looking at the water.

"What is wrong with you lately Harry?" Ron asked as calmly as possible but he could not stop the anger showing in the voice. Nobody ever tells his girlfriend to shut up." You over react to everything!"

"Oh, as if you would care! I got more letters this summer from Percy than I did from you! You spend your whole summer pashing while I was stuck at that goddam house which I hate even more than Voldemort." Harry roared making the Giant Squid disappear into the depths of the lake. He suddenly wanted to get away from everyone and everything. The lake had began to look even more inviting than it did a second ago. He wondered how would it feel to die, while fiddling with the wand inside his pocket.

Hermione frowned watching Harry " We already said we were sorry and you know professor Dumbledore had forbidden as to send any letters to you."

"Professor Dumbledore, oh my!" Harry laughed miming a girl's high voice. " Who the fuck cares what the dumb idiot says, he got the IQ of a poltergeist"

"Harry, please calm down. Can we talk about it?" Hermione asked silkily.

"Um, let me see. How about...NO! Just fuck off you Mudblood and leave me alone!" Harry shouted his voice going cold and high. He turned towards the castle and ran up to his dormitory as fast as he could. There was something wrong, why on earth would he call Hermione a Mudblood? He wasn't like that, was he?

He reached his dormitory unsure of what to do. They would never forgive him, they would hate him, everyone will. From this day on he would be considered worse than Malfoy, he would be despised ignored like in his Muggle School. No! Never again! If he had no future at Hogwarts, there was only one thing left to do. He took out the knife from his pocket and sat down on his bed. He tried to cut but it did not work, he was only scratching the skin. He tried several times by the end he was only more frustrated, kicking the chair next to the bed he stopped his attempts of suicide. How about you just give it up, ah? Asked a voice inside his head.

"No you idiot, come on. This is your chance to do what you need without anyone disturbing you. Do it! "A high pitched cold voice

shouted. Any resistance Harry had had was crushed as the cold voice kept repeating the same words "do it, do it"

He began slicing his wrists once more watching as blood poured out. Gritting his teeth he lay down on the bed leaving the knife on the side.

This is freedom, this is it he thought closing his eyes.

.....

Sorry for the cliffhanger, I'll try not to leave you hanging too long. Please don't send me flames for 'killing' Harry! I love him as much as everyone else does.

.....

HoshiHikari4ever –Wow, I am surprised you were the only one who asked about the owl. But it's been answered in the chapter anyway.

Blubb-blubb -Yeah, I think Voldemort might end up less mean although I am not show how to portray it yet. As for Harry, that can't be helped I am afraid.

Crazedgurl1291 – Mad teenager? That's the perfect way of describing him!

Liseli –I have to admit I didn't even think of keeping them canon when I was writing this, but at least some characters should become a bit more like they are in the original books. Hey, and if you want you can send me that story you are writing, I might be able to see what isn't working.

Princess Antoinette - Yep, very nutters, going even more nutters soon. There is no reason for the chapter names, I just feel like it.

SnakeDynasty – Here is your update, I hope you still remember the story.

Henio, Linky2, Saxistwriterchickv, ShatteredxDream, Silver-Entrantress-Elf, The Vampire Story Hunter - Thanks for reviewing guys!

## Chapter 5 – Of Anger and Suicides

Hermione was shocked by Harry's outburst; she sat in silence not moving. Why would Harry call her a mudblood?

Ron leaned over to hug her whispering, "I am sure he did not mean it, Hermione." She did not reply instead silent tears started to fall. What had happened to her old friend? The nice Harry, who was always there to help and would never laugh at her troubles?

"Shh, don't cry love, it going to be alright" Ron mumbled pulling Hermione even closer than before, that was all he could say, he too was afraid for his friend " Maybe we should tell somebody, see what they would suggest we should do?"

"All right, if you really insist" Hermione replied half heartily. They walked silently up to McGonagall's office. They stopped outside the room, unsure of what say or do. Both of them stared at the door quietly neither wanting to knock or enter first.

To their luck perhaps Professor McGonagall was leaving the office anyway. She opened the not very surprised to see the two Gryffindors on her doorstep.

"Is there something you need to discuss?" she asked her voice as neutral as possible.

"Yes" Hermione replied shakily, she entered the office and Ron followed. Professor McGonagall took a breath; she had a few thoughts of what this conversation might be about.

"Sit down then." The Gryffindors obeyed through they leaned on the chairs rather uneasily.

Ron swallowed loudly and muttered, "It's about Harry. " The Professor nodded, her fears were correct.

"Well you had better tell me the problem, there is no point sitting here staring into space" Professor McGonagall said after a few seconds of silence, both Gryffindors seemed to be avoiding her eyes." I

understand this is probably very hard, but it will be better if you come outright and face it."

"He has been acting a bit strange lately, he is not sleeping, not eating, he barely talks and when he does he usually shouts annoyed about something. He is so touchy, everything gets him angry these days." Hermione said miserably.

"We are afraid of saying anything to him, since if we do he starts going on about how unfair his life is or something" Ron stated falling back on the chair.

Professor McGonagall sighed, perhaps this was worse then she had thought " You have spend most of the holidays with him, why are you telling me this now? "

"I think he might do something stupid, he was looking at the lake in a funny way today" Hermione replied shaking her head " And he called me a mudblood." Professor McGonagall could not help but stare, Potter insulting people because of their heritage, what has gotten into the boy? Everyone seemed to be concerned about him lately, but he could not see it. Remus tried to talk to his during the summer break but he merely ignored any talk of Sirius or anything else for that matter.

"Where is he now?" she enquired.

Ron went pale" He just walked out on us, um I have no idea where he might have gone to." Hermione nodded shaking.

Professor McGonagall frowned, the two were right in worrying, Harry did not think about the consequences he just did what he felt he had to do. But what could the boy be thinking? He was rash and angry; she did not forget the fight with Malfoy earlier this morning either.

"Look how about you go and find him try to talk to him again see what happens. Harry has been through a lot and I think you are better at understanding his feelings then I am" she said at last not looking at Ron or Hermione. They nodded through they did not seem satisfied with the decision.



Ginny was looking around for Harry; she bullied him into promising to help her with her homework earlier over the summer. She had checked the library and around the castle, but there was no trace of him anywhere. Finally she went back to the Common Room hoping someone has seen him sometime. One of the younger Gryffindors said that he saw Harry coming up to the dormitory, having no other clues of his whereabouts she went up to Harry's Room.

"Harry? You there?" she called knocking on the closed door, there was no reply but she thought she heard soft ruffling coming from inside the room. She slowly pushed the door open hoping not to intrude on anyone's privacy. She screamed at the sight before her.

Harry on his bed as pale as a ghost surrounded by sheets covered with blood. She thought she was going to be sick as she noticed a shiny kitchen knife lying on the side; it was covered in blood.

"Ginny, what happened?" Neville shouted coming up the stairs

Ginny didn't reply until he saw the sight too " We have to get him to the Hospital Wing" she mumbled trying to ignore the sick sensation in her stomach. She checked for Harry's pulse, it was very faint but still there. She conjured up a pair of stretchers and helped Neville move the unconscious boy. Together they made their way to the Hospital Wing thankful for the empty hallways.

Madam Pomfrey was rather appalled by what had happened, but she tended to Harry as if he was her own son. Ginny smirked at the thought that the strict nurse had become rather attached to Harry over the years. Perhaps it was not that strange considering the fact Harry a lot more time around the Hospital Wing then any other student.

Ginny and Neville couldn't do anything but wait as Madam Pomfrey nursed their friend. Eventually Professor McGonagall was called; surprisingly Ron and Hermione were with her as well. They did not ask what happened, they had a pretty good idea anyway.

Sometime in the afternoon Neville decided to go clean the dorm since the other boys would not enjoy sleeping near such a large amount of blood. If anyone was surprised they did not show it, instead they merely nodded and continued to sit in silence.

It was going dark by the time Madam Pomfrey had finished tending to Harry and allowed the rest into the room.

Be quiet and you are in here for five minutes only while I talk to Professor McGonagall, understood?" the nurse ordered.

"Yes, madam" the Gryffindors said in unison.

"What happened guys?" Ginny asked her voice was shaking as she looked at Harry.

Madam Pomfrey's matter-of-fact voice carried in from the other room " He sure butchered himself deep, he is mentally unstable if you ask me! No normal healthy child could have done this!"

Professor McGonagall replied weakly " You know about the boys life, I would have had a break down a long time ago if I were him"

No one wanted to listen any longer. Instead they surveyed Harry, he was still pale, his wrists bandaged. He looked very fragile against the white sheets.

"We had a fight that's all." Ron finally replied to Ginny's question. Ginny's eyes went wide but she did not say anything instead she made her way towards the sink on the side of the room hoping to wash her hands as they were covered in blood. But the blood had long dried staining her hands, giving up she returned to her seat continuing to stare at the wall.

Madam Pomfrey came back ready to throw them out " Visit time is over, shoo." No one moved and a long silence followed.

"Why?" asked Ron at last.

Madam Pomfrey looked irritated " Because Mr. Weasley, you friend needs rest and quiet!" she shouted

"He is unconscious, he can't hear as anyway!" Ginny argued hiding her hands behind her back. Mumbling something the nurse left the room not bothering to argue any longer. The others sat back down staring at different points on the wall.

Harry was very cold as he woke up; he kept his eyes closed unsure of what to do. He could not remember what had happened nor did he realise where he was. The only thing he remembered was a sharp sting and blood, a lot of blood. They had tried to kill him, he was sure of it.

Oh shit! he thought snapping his eyes open, he was met by the shiny white ceiling he had become very familiar with over the years. There was silence all around him but he was pretty sure he could hear several people's muffled breathing. He waited for someone to speak, but no one seemed to realise he was awake. He finally lost his temper again.

"What the fuck do you think you are doing here, you bloody murderers!" he shouted sitting up enraged. The other Gryffindors did not reply for their confusion and very much surprised by Harry's sudden outburst. Madam Pomfrey entered the room alarmed by Harry's shouting, she motioned him to lie down but the boy ignored her.

"Don't touch me you, you fat cow!" he shouted, sniggering at his own insult.

"Is that what I get for trying to help you? Foul language and complains!" Madam Pomfrey declared looking awestruck.

Harry continued his string of insults, but after a while they become much too repetitive to be worthwhile to listen to.

"That's enough Harry!" finally commanded a voice of a person standing at the doorway. No one dared to move, even Harry stopped

in the middle of another string of curses directed at his friends." Please calm down all of you."

Few have ever seen the headmaster so angry. The sweet twinkle in his eyes was gone replaced by steely cold almost hunted-like look " What do you think you are doing Harry?"

Harry stumbled for a while-" I.. um ...you"- actually resembling the old Harry for a second but then regained his anger "Why the fucking hell you care?!" he screamed making the windows in the room shake, his eyes turned silver for a second before coming back to normal, but no one noticed. He jumped out of bed, thankfully he was still wearing his muggle clothes, Madam Pomfrey had bothered to remove the bloodstains from them.

"Cause we care for you Harry, that's why." the Headmaster said, his voice softening. The others nodded, thinking the fight was over madam Pomfrey left the room once more.

"If you care so much, why then did you try to kill me?" Harry asked with a strange curiosity in his voice " Tell me!"

"What? What are you going on about?" Ron questioned going pale, as he was afraid to have missed something important.

"Don't lie! I remember, you stabbed me, in the dormitory!" Harry shouted his voice deathly sure. Even Dumbledore looked confused." I knew it! You were going to convince me I tried to kill my self and then proclaim me mad! Tough luck 'cause I am leaving right now, no doubt I will be seeing you around sometime, don't be surprised if I start to haunt your nightmares!" Harry finished.

He opened the window and took out his wand, with almost lightning speed he climbed on the windowsill and jumped off. In midair he called his broom forgetting every objection he had to flying, not even bothering to consider what might happen if he failed to summon it. The broom of-course came, he had long perfected the curse in his forth year. Quickly he flew into his room and took a few of his things.

Harry then sped off flying high he did not look back to the castle or remembered his friends. He did not know where exactly to go as he had never been there before, but he was sure his instinct would lead him to his future.

Back at the school everyone in the room stood open mouthed.

"What do you think he will do, Professor?" Hermione asked her voice shaking badly. The headmaster did not answer instead he walked out of the room not looking back, he hurried back to his office. He walked into his office making sure to tell the gargoyles not to let any one in and started pacing the room debating his actions.

"You knew this might happen Albus don't blame yourself," stated one of the Portraits on the walls.

Dumbledore groaned "and you couldn't help the boy, could you?"

"I tried, his will is stronger than mine" the portrait protested.

"What ever you say, Godric." Dumbledore muttered continuing to pace. Shortly after he gave up on trying to think on his own, he was much too aggravated. Throwing some powder in the fireplace he called the Potions Master and the Deputy Headmistress. It was Professor Snape who arrived first, he was very annoyed to be interrupted from his work

"What is it Professor? Did somebody try to curse his or her pimples of again?" he groaned.

"Firstly, it's Albus, not Professor or Headmaster or Sir or anything else of that kind. Lets just wait until Minerva comes" Dumbledore stated, staring at the sleeping picture of Salazar Slytherin as most of the older portraits this one looked like it was nearly hanging on the ceiling instead of the wall. Professor Snape nodded and sat down, he did not have to wait long, Professor McGonagall entered the room panting heavily.

"There is a strange rumour that Harry Potter has left the school, every child seems to be asking if it's true. Who was delusional enough to

start something like that? It's spreading like wild fire!" she complained. Looking at the headmaster she asked slowly. "It's not true is it?"

"Unfortunately it is" Dumbledore replied somewhat nervous of the look the others were giving him.

"What are we going to do?" the Potions Master asked " It's going to be hard to keep such news from the Dark Lord, most of the school most likely already know by now, they will tell their parents and he will be told by them."

"Do try to keep it secret." Dumbledore replied fearfully.

"Where is Harry going?" Professor McGonagall asked

"I do not know, I doubt it is any where we want him to be." Dumbledore shook his head. " I fear the worst but I don't know for sure just yet."

"Is there some way we can be certain?" Professor McGonagall asked grimly. Dumbledore once again glanced at the portraits around him thinking, he shook his head once more. Professor Snape gave a sudden yelp.

"He is calling." He said eyes full of fear.

"Go" the other Professors said automatically. The Potions Master was already fleeing to Voldemort.

Professor McGonagall shut her eyes as if hoping it was all a bad dream. "He is not coming back, I don't need predictions to tell me, I know that myself"

Dumbledore nodded sadly "Can you see make sure the others are not alarmed by the rumours"

Professor Dumbledore watched the Deputy leave, he felt about filthy years too old to be doing this and about hundred years dumber. How could he have missed all the signs? He could have stopped it, but no

he had to be a clueless old fool. Now it was pretty much lost, Voldemort will win.

His gaze fell on the book that lay open on the table. It showed the family trees of the founders of Hogwarts, there somewhere at the bottom of the list was Fudge's name and many others's, but this was not what was interesting. On the next page the Gryffindor and Slytherin trees, they wavered down to only two people, the two people he hoped would never find out about their ancestry, but he was very certain they already had.

What could he do? He had gotten Harry into trouble before, but not like this there were always ways he could escape. But how to escape from himself? How to escape from what he was, his power? Tom Riddle was a great wizard, so was Salazar, they were both consumed by the greater evil. He had himself said many times that there was no good or evil, yet he always lied.

Poor Harry, my dear boy, what have I done? Dumbledore rested his face on the table, as the tears in his eyes started to form.

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Hmmm, that's got to be the shortest chapter in the whole story. Sorry about the delay, we are updating our computers and I couldn't get on one that's not scattered around the floor until now. Uggh, the house is such a mess, all these wires and metal bits lying around the floor.

Anyway, please review!

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saxistwriterchick – glad you liked it

Henio – the update is here. It's a bit late, but, BUT I actually now have some idea what's going to happen in the last few chapters (doing things blindly is no fun)

Crazedgurl1291 – Yeah, it was pretty tense. Draco just came to torture Harry, no other reason for him being there.

VioletS – Evil Harry is always fun

ironic-humour - My writing style, I didn't realise there was anything special about it, but thank- you!

The Vampire Story Hunter – ah, the breaking point indeed. Nuh, Voldemort has very little to do with what's happening and Dumbledore is just being DUMB. Harry's own power? Weeeell, I don't know what kind of powers he might have that might stop him doing stupid things.



## Chapter 6- Of Alliances and Changes

"Professor Dumbledore?" Ginny asked, " I suppose he wants to alert the order or whatever."

"Harry?" Hermione mumbled shakily.

"I can't believe he did this, I can't believe it!" Ron whimpered his eyes wide in shock.

"I am sure he will be all right" Ginny said almost automatically not even believing her own words. She stared at her hands once more but stayed quiet.

"What are we meant to do now!" Ron cried out in frustration starting Hermione and Ginny. He kicked the bed going into full hysterics "That slimy snake, what the hell was he thinking!"

Ginny couldn't help but giggle watching her usually calm brother shouting and kicking the furniture, but she was rather worried when he slammed his fist into the wall so hard it got dented. It putting on the calmest voice she could master Ginny said

"That's enough Ron, kicking and breaking the furniture is not going to help us much. I don't know what to do either. None of us can even begin to figure out the way Harry thinks, but we know he does not make his decisions rashly"

"That's just it Ginny, his thinking has been clouded lately, you have seen it herself" Hermione replied grimly, she had ignored Ron's small tantrum but was brought back to earth by Ginny.

"What is wrong with you? Are you just going to let him go without putting up a fight!" Ron shouted once more. The youngest Weasley and Hermione said nothing though they were about to burst out laughing at the time it had taken their friend to come up with a comeback. Ron stumbled suddenly uncertain " Well?" she said.

"What exactly are you planning on doing? Running after him?" Ginny asked suspiciously.

"Maybe that's not such a bad idea, I think he is in for a lot of trouble" Ron replied thoughtfully.

"Maybe we should check that idiot's room and see if he left in clues. Honestly he is so weird sometimes." Hermione said semi calmly although she was rather annoyed too.

The three left the Hospital Wing using the less populated passageways to avoid people. They had no doubts that by now most of the school had heard of what had happened. As they reached the door to the dormitory Ginny started to shake uncontrollably.

"I can't go in there" she muttered. Ron put his hand on her shoulder hoping some brotherly support would calm her up. Hermione sighed and pushed the door open shutting her eyes.

Ginny let out a breath of relief, Neville had cleaned up as he had promised. He did a good job too there was no bloodstains to be seen. Harry's bed was made up the blanket perfectly clean, but the rest of his things were left in disarray, scattered around on the floor.

"What's missing?" Hermione asked, "I suppose Harry did this right?" Ron nodded searching through his friend's belongings.

"His dress robes, spare contacts, the invisibility cloak, Marauders map and his broomstick obviously. I suppose his wand as well, Harry never goes anywhere without it." Ron stated slowly looking at the others "He didn't even take the money he had."

"Clearly he didn't think his school things mattered" Hermione declared "Where is that album he had?"

"I suppose he didn't think it mattered anymore" Ginny replied picking up the occasional scraps of paper scattered between everything else. One of them showed James Potter's happy face.

"What are you thinking Harry?" Ron asked suspiciously his eyes fixed on the window in the room.

"I would ask if he was thinking at all." Ginny replied picking out the scraps of the photos. She hoped she would be able to fix them and give them back to Harry when he returned. A grim question surfaced her mind, is he going to return at all?

"So where do you think he is going?" Ron asked eagerly.

"Anywhere but here, I suppose." Ginny replied starting to pile all Harry's things into his trunk. They heard someone opening the door to the room.

"Oh, um hi." Hermione turned around going red "How are you?"

"So has Harry really left?" Dean questioned, " It's all around the school, supposedly someone has seen him flying away!"

"Oh, er, yeah. We might as well tell you now guys. Can you please try to keep it quiet?" Hermione replied.

"Of-course we will" Seamus and Dean said almost in unison. Ginny smiled lightly, but couldn't hide her worry of the whole school knowing what really happened." So why did Harry leave?"

"I suppose he got too tired of it all" Ron said sitting down on his bed "I rather not have dinner in the hall tonight, too many questions."

"Sure Ron, we'll bring you some food." Seamus assured understanding; Harry was after all Ron's best friend.

"I see you have joined us at last Severus, you certainly took your time." Voldemort stated. Snape's throat went dry; making the Dark Lord angry was usually paid back by an extensive punishment.

"I am sorry my lord, the old fool had to continue blabbing over how good his school is, he never did learn to shut his mouth." Snape said, there I have insulted Dumbledore but at least you are happy.

"Indeed an old fool he is. He does not realise he cannot protect it, I already have my weapon, it's coming now." Voldemort stated in triumph. The Death Eater exchanged sidelong glances through their

masks; no one knew what he meant. "Have any of you found a way to get into Hogwarts yet?"

The Death Eaters shook their heads a few of them were trembling from head to toe, most knew what will come next. Voldemort looked at each person one by one, most likely trying to break their mind to see if any were hiding their real thoughts.

"To bad my servants, your chance is now gone. He knows how to enter Hogwarts, you don't. He will be my equal he will be my entrusted. You have failed me, he will not." Voldemort said mysteriously. He is playing games with us, that's what he is doing Snape thought. Voldemort turned his head sharply to look where Snape was standing.

"Severus, you know what I am talking about, don't you?"

"Perhaps I do, I cannot be sure." Snape replied silkily. Voldemort smiled, of-course he knew what this was about, but let them keep their secret for a while longer.

"You see my servants, you are very lucky to witness this union. Today you will see the two greatest wizards of our time join together in command. Today you will tell your grandchildren about, I can assure you that is if you live that long of-course" Voldemort laughed his voice going high and cold making the hair stand on the Death Eater's backs.

"Perhaps you can tell us plainer, my lord?" Lucius asked, Snape did not see his face but Malfoy Senior was the only one with enough foolishness to ask the Dark Lord such a question.

"Perhaps I do not wish to, if there are no surprises in your life, then it would be very boring. I trust you agree Weasley?" Voldemort asked turning to the Death Eater on his left side.

"Of-course I do my lord" Snape was horrified to see Percy Weasley standing in his Death Eater mask. Snape thought Weasley's were decent people. One or two Death Eaters kept moving from side to side.

"I see you are getting tired of standing my loyal servants. Sit down!" Voldemort ordered hearing a few complains he went on "Yes on the floor, it doesn't matter!" The Death Eaters sat down groaning but none dared to say anything serious.

"Nagini will you please watch the door, tell me when he is coming" Voldemort hissed to his pet snake, naturally none of the others understood. The snake slid out of the room to some dark corner of the corridor outside. The meeting went on for hours until Snape was nearly falling asleep.

Somewhere high above the countryside a lone person was flying. He was slightly tired and cold, yet he continued flying to reach his destination. His eyes flashed furiously silver but there was nobody to notice it. He smiled to himself as he saw the distant village that could be barely made out in the soft moonlight. He saw the familiar graveyard; he had been there two years ago. On the hill he saw an old house, he had also recognized it from his dreams, dimly he thought he remembered the name, The Riddle House.

He flew down to the front of it, the front door was open, he was expected then. Walking in he looked around the main hall. Once this house was very rich, but now it was in urgent need of repair, stepping cautiously up the stairs to the other parts of the Manor he heard Voldemort's cold voice in the distance. Grinning he turned to follow the sound yet trying to be quiet.

He was almost there when he stumbled over something, he almost screamed out before realising it was only a snake. He watched the creature slide into the room while listening to Voldemort's voice

"Cornelius Fudge is a fool, he will have to be removed. We must then put one of you..." Voldemort stopped abruptly in the middle of the sentence when he noticed Nagini move into the room.

"Yes Nagini?" Voldemort hissed to his pet snake. "What is it?" He listened eagerly his face not moving. Harry paused to make sure there were no Death Eaters already pointing his wands at him just around the corner. He peeped in carefully his heart beating madly.

“Well you might as well come in, there is no point standing in the entrance if you are not going to enter” Voldemort suggested flatly.

Walking into the room Harry took a deep breath and greeted his enemy “Good Evening, Mr. Riddle.” He was very nervous, but not of Voldemort. He would not kill him instantly, however Voldemort liked to talk first, but the Death Eaters were another matter. They were always competing with each other eager to prove which one of them was the best of all and the only way they could do that is to please their master. Wouldn't the best way to do this, is to kill his worst enemy?

“Ah, Harry you have come to join as, it's going to be a great party” Voldemort smiled, to every Death Eater's surprise, it was a warm smile, not a sarcastic grin they were used to. Snape stared, how can the boy just walk into a Death Eater meeting and not die immediately and where did the “Tom” thing come from?

“ I am sure it will be greatly enjoyable. Excuse me for my lateness I got slightly held up” Harry beamed to the Death Eaters. He surveyed the scene, the room was filled with masked wizards and witches, and there was only one source of light in the room, the fireplace beside Voldemort, this limited his vision badly. He glanced at the masks hoping to see the faces behind them; a few whimpered their eyes wide. Snape sat not moving there was nothing he could do, but watch.

“ Do you wish for something to eat? It must have been a long flight.” Voldemort asked, he spoke as if to an old friend rather than his greatest foe. Harry nodded sitting at an empty chair beside the Dark Lord. The boy appeared tired, but relieved also. The Death Eaters did not kill him instantly, that was good at least. He picked up an apple from a plate brought to him.

He watched the Death Eaters and laughed. “ Your servants sit around you like children around their teacher in kinder garden.”

Voldemort snorted at the remark “ You know Harry you are right, I have never thought of it before. How are the apples? I haven't tried any of them yet, but I can assure you the grapes are beautiful”

Harry picked up a few grapes smiling happily he stated, "You are right, much better than Hogwarts." To the rest of those in the room the two rivals appeared to be quite comfortable while talking. Lucius Malfoy cast a side glance at Snape, the Professor nearly shrugged in return, this was just as much beyond him as anyone else.

"I have to admit I am surprised to see you here, I have almost given up on you. Ah, this reminds me of something... From ancient grudge break to new munity, where civil blood make civil hands unclean." Voldemort casually remarked.

"Shakespeare, Tom? This is rather unexpected, you are familiar with his works then?"

"Yes indeed. A glooming peace this morning with it brings, The sun for sorrow will not show it's head, Go, hence to have talk of these sad things"

"Some shall be pardoned, and some punished. For never was a story of more woe, then one of Juliet and her Romeo." Harry finished thoughtfully "Shakespeare wrote very sentimental peaces, I have to admit."

"Yes sentimental indeed, but also quite inspiring" Voldemort replied "By no means old and forgotten, it is still very much relevant today"

"Yes, especially in the magic world. I have found over the years the magic community is slow to change or break their habits." Harry replied picking up another bunch of grapes. They continued talking about the defenses of magic and wizarding worlds for a while, much to misgivings of Voldemort's servants. They had just finished their food when Voldemort brought them both back to earth. "So you I guess you have chosen you path, what are your terms?"

Harry grinned, "You are rather straight forward about more important matters. Yes, for the time being I will stay with you. You will teach me as your heir and the next Dark Lord, you will have the Death Eaters treat me with the same respect they show you"

Voldemort narrowed his eyes “ And in return?”

“ In return, I will give you Hogwarts, Ministry of Magic and everything rightfully belonging to the Slytherin House” Harry replied deadly serious “ I have no wish to claim the throne, nor do I think the Ministry are sufficient in their task.”

“ It seems I am getting so much more then you are, this is quite strange.” Voldemort questioned slowly not looking anywhere but Harry’s eyes

“ You do not think past the European Continent, but there is a wide world beyond it. Let me rule the West, which is my claim and mine only. And one more thing, don’t kill the mudblood or the Weasley, I wish to deal with them my-self.” Harry replied menacingly.

“ It’s seems like a fair deal, Lord Gryffindor” Voldemort stated offering his hand.

“ Together we will rule the world, Lord Slytherin” Harry took Voldemort’s hand his voice raising and becoming horribly cold “ Witness this union, the warriors of Darkness, this is the beginning of new era. The Age of Lords.”

“Bow before your dual masters, equal in power and command!” Voldemort finished the ceremonial speech rising to his feet “ Go now my dark creatures spread the word!”

The Death Eaters looked at each other completely amazed at what had just happened, but one by one they started to leave. Snape was the last to stay, staring at Harry. He hoped to find a trace of something, perhaps weakness in either of the men, but there was nothing both stood proudly side-by-side. They seemed to illuminate power, their eyes glowing, Voldemort’s pale, freezing cold green and Harry’s bright luminous silver.

There was nothing he could do, the Potions Master left to report the news to the order.

“So my lord, have you chosen your name?” Voldemort bowed deeply.



Harry stumbled for the moment “ No, not yet, my lord. Leave be to dwell on this issue for the time being. You will have my answer soon enough.” He took out his wand and softly muttered a spell, his dirty school uniform turned into stylish robes. They were long even for his current size and height; the silver material shone in the firelight radiating around the room “ Perhaps we can have a decent meal now, my lord?”

Voldemort nodded, he led Harry into another room, and much more comfortable than the room they had been in. It had a large table in it with only two high chairs. All was decorated in most lavish designs. Harry was rather surprised, after the dirty meeting room this one seemed to belong somewhere completely different.

“A more private section of this house I suppose?” Harry asked still unused to the posh surroundings, not even Hogwarts could ever match this.

Voldemort nodded “ Yes, my private dining area. Welcome to the Riddle House, newly renovated and refurnished to my taste.” They both sat down not speaking as they ate their real dinner. It was Harry who broke the silence

“I trust we can talk freely here.” He put his fork down waiting for the answer.

“ Yes, of-course. Now is the time if any that we discuss the matters we are both concerned with.” Voldemort replied also stopping eating.

“ I know all the passage ways in and out of Hogwarts, I also know where every person in the castle is situated. I can sneak your troops in without anybody notice a thing.” Harry stated coldly.

“ What about the protection of the school? And the castle it self?” Voldemort asked eagerly.

“ The protection can be easily lifted if one knows how to and the castle itself will obey us. We are the rightful masters of the place.”

Harry reassured the second man; as long as Voldemort trusts him the plan will not fail.

“Alright, we shall make more detailed plans later. I wish to question your education.”

“ I do realise it will be taxing and possibly painful, I am prepared to accept that fact “ Harry cut off the other man, pausing he looked at Voldemort’s expression “ And I am also aware of the danger of it, I am prepared to die for this Tom.”

“ Understood Harry. If you are willing enough, then I will teach you. But now you must rest for tomorrow. You there!” Voldemort shouted to a house-elf standing outside the door with his hands over his ears “ Take the young lord to his quarters!”

Harry followed the elf around the house; he was shocked by the difference between the front of the house and the back. Perhaps there were some sort of protection spells cast on the house; it would make sense if Voldemort were trying to protect his privacy. They reached a room on the end of one of the smaller passages; Harry surveyed his surroundings very briefly noticing the size of the room, with a huge bed in the middle and a writing desk to one side. Ordering the house elf to leave Harry collapsed on the bed.

He did not bother changing but merely crawled underneath the cover. He was tired since he did not have proper sleep for months, yet now he hoped he was simply too tired to have any dreams.

## Chapter 7 – Of Lessons and Meetings

The rest of the weekend passed rather peacefully at Hogwarts considering the wild rumours that were flying around the school. Hermione, Ron and most other Gryffindors largely ignored them but could not help to be worried in case anyone of the rumours just happened to be true.

The two Weasleys, Hermione and Neville had stayed in their rooms most of the time so they were troubled by the way the other houses might treat them during lessons and such things. The only good thing was the fact that Defence Against the Dark Arts class was first and they were eager to find out who their new professor was.

Putting up brave faces they set out to the Great Hall for breakfast.

"Are you ready?" Ginny asked just outside the door to the hall.

Ron sighed "As ready as we will ever be, let's go no time to waste"

Ron and Hermione and Ginny and Neville entered holding each others sweaty, shaking hands. The whole school went quiet as they entered much to the four friends' horror.

"Hey Weasel! Where is Pothead?" Malfoy shouted from the Slytherin table "You just lost your only friend, mublood, I feel sorry for you!"

"That's enough Mr. Malfoy!" McGonagall shouted "What happened with Mr. Potter is a private matter that does not concern you!"

"If only you knew Professor" Malfoy replied just loud enough for the whole school to hear. He resumed eating smirking boldly. Slowly the rest drew their eyes from the four Gryffindors and returned to their breakfast. The four calmed down and took seats at the Gryffindor table.

"I wonder what Malfoy is talking about." Neville asked. "What do you have first, Ginny?"

"Potions." Ginny stated grimly "With Slytherins"

"Too bad sis, you are in trouble" Ron replied smirking "Actually, I always thought it was only our year that was so unfourtunate, but I now I am starting to think Dumbledore is playing some sort of a long lasting joke on the Gryffindor House"

Hermione giggled kissing Ron on the cheek " Sound just like something he would do doesn't it?"

"We better go guys. We have to get good seats for the first day, who knows the teacher might assign us a seating arrangment or something" Neville said looking at Ginny somewhat absentmindedly.

The sixth year Gryffindors made their way to the DADA classroom. Taking seats on one of the side desks just so not to be right infront of the teacher just incase. The headmaster of the school walked in shortly after the bell.

"Well it seems we have the sixth year here. Quite a few memorable faces in this class" he said looking at Hermione, Ron, Neville and a few others around the room. "It seems you were the year that just started Hogwarts when our trouble with Defence Against the Dark Arts teachers began"

"Sir, who is our new teacher?" Dean asked boldly.

"Good question. For the junior years we have one of the ministry aurors teaching this year. The senior years horever will suffer my own teaching this year." Dumbledore replied pleasantly. He called the roll to ensure everyone was there pausing only briefly on the name "Harry Potter" before continuing.

" Now we better begin, let us see if you have learned anything from your previous years, please Ms. Granger do be considerate and allow some of your classmates to answer an accaisonal question" Dumbledore said his eyes twinkling, no one could help but laugh. "Who knows how to recognise a werewolf form from a normal wolf?"

Several hands went up into the air Dumbledore picked out a few answers before he seemed satisfied " What are the three unforgivable curses?"

"Imperius, Avada Kevadra and Criatus" Neville replied not even putting up his hand. " Each would make you spend a lifetime in Azkaban for the suffering you will bring another being by using any of the three spells"

"Very good Neville, however you should try to put up your hand before responding" the Headmaster nodded " One last question, do any of you know how to ward off Dementors?"

A few previous DA members put up their hands shakely, this question reminded them too much of someone they knew. Noting his students change of mood the professor noted not to bring up the subject again if possible, but still he better go on since he had already started.

"Well, Hermione I think it is your turn at last, tell us and possibly show us" he said.

Hermione took a deep breath before starting " The best way to defend yourself against a Dementor is to use the Patronus charm. EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

A sleek silver otter shot out of her wand as most of the class ohed and ahed over it. Satisfied Hermione lowered her wand and the patronus vanished in to thin air. Kids, so charming to watch them at their moments of triumph. Dumbledore thought

"Sir, are you alright?" somebody asked "you look a little pale."

"Oh, I am fine just had a déjà vu, perhaps I am getting old " Dumbledore replied of handedly.

"Don't say that sir, it's not true " Neville said

"You are a forever a ripe young man full of life" Seamus confirmed.

"Well I trust your word then. Let us start work then before we all die of boredom."

"What are we studying this year, sir?" Seamus asked

"Again good question. This year you will be learning how to defend yourselves from Dark Arts and big detail." Dumbledore replied.

Hermione put up her hand " Will it be somewhat like our lessons with H-Harry during DA meetings?"

Delightful, Harry just keeps creeping up. It's a pity he is not even here  
"Yes Ms. Granger somewhat like that and I can assure you all we will be doing practical work." Dumbledore smiled. 'Alright take notes and question at the end."

The rest of the class went smoothly by the end not even the few Slytherins who attended the class could disagree Dumbledore was more than capable teacher. As the bell rang they slowly packed their belongings and left discussing the lesson.

"Ron, Hermione and Neville will you be kind enough to stay back for a minute, I'll write a note to the next teacher." Dumbledore asked. Confused as to why they were addressed by their first names the three made their way to the front.

"Yes sir." Ron mumbled.

"How are you coping?" Dumbledore demanded.

"Oh, okay a suppose, it's a bit unnerving to have every one staring at you all the time " Neville replied.

"I see. Have any of you thought about about continuing the DA?" Dumbledore asked.

"Well Harry was the one who taught us so it's a bit hard to continue something of that kind without a teacher." Hermione replied.

" Alright we will see what we can do about that.' Dumbledore said " You may go."

The three nodded and left the room, it was only when they reached their next class they realised they had completely forgotten about the note they were promised. Shrugging they hoped their teacher was in a good enough mood to let them off.

"You are late, sit down before I take off any points" Professor McGonagall ordered. "Now before I was interrupted I was saying. This year we will learn how Transfiguration can be used for defence or attack in a dangerous situation."

"Or more simply, when a Death Eater tries to murder you." Ron whispered

"Don't laugh about stuff like that, this might help us one day to save your own or even someone else's life." Hermione responded.

The class got bored very quickly as most of the lesson was merely revision from the previous year. After the lesson they met Ginny at the Entrance Hall.

"How were Potions?" Neville asked.

Ginny made a face "Horrible, Snape is seriously pissed off."

"What was he taking points off for breathing?" Ron laughed

"Worse, he was taking points of his own House." Ginny replied.

Ron and Hermione looked at each other "You are right, he must be really angry about something " Hermione said sternly.

"He kept muttering things like 'I can't believe the stupidity' and things of the kind, from what I could tell he wasn't saying nice stuff about whoever the whole thing was about." Ginny replied.

"Hm, well he was always wacko if you ask me, maybe he finally went over the edge." Ron replied

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"Good afternoon Severus." Dumbledore said pleasantly as Snape walked into the headmaster's office "I hear you gave your Potions class quite a day to remember."

Snape groaned "They deserved everything they got."

"Perhaps they did, but did you know I could hear the grunting from here, they certainly didn't sound exceptionally pleased." Dumbledore noted " You can't just keep taking your anger out on the students."

"Why Albus? I have been doing that for many years now, why change now?" Snape asked.

"Because you might realise the students dislike you for a reason and if you obliterate that reason it might make it a lot easier for the whole of the school." Dumbledore stated.

"Truly you didn't bring me up here to discuss my teaching habits?" Snape asked carefully.

Dumbledore smiled "You know what this is about Severus."

"Maybe we shouldn't discuss this until the rest of the order arrived?" Snape asked "Wait, it might be better if we kept one thing between ourselves for now. I saw Percy Weasley yesterday."

"Was he..." Dumbledore paused.

"I don't know, he was there with a mask on, but I recognised his voice." Snape said slowly.

Dumbledore shook his head " Perhaps it's better Molly not know about it yet."

"Waybe we should get a move on and get to the Headquarters?" Snape suggested.



Dumbledore stepped in to the fireplace first and Snape followed him as Floo Powder was the safest method to use apart from apparation. They were transported to the large chamber at the basement of the Black Family house. Most people were already there talking loudly as they sat around the large table. To Dumbledore the table always resembled the one the knights used in the Legends of King Arthur, all in a circle, all equal.

"Ah you are here!" Arthur said motioning to them to take their seats. "How was your day?"

Snape sat down on his usual slightly worn velvet covered chair. Most had the same chair yet his was older, it was easy to see. He turned to face the crowd and replies "Horrible as usual, at least your daughter was smart enough to keep quiet."

"Tea? Coffee? Have a sandwich Severus." Mrs. Weaslet offered a large platter full of sandwiches.

"After was I saw not that long ago I definitely don't want to eat anything." Snape replied. "I can't believe his stupidity."

The last of the members have arrived and taken their seats, most were now sipping on their drinks staring at the Potions Master.

Snape sighed " I suppose I am not going to be nice about it. Potter has joined the Dark Lord."

Several loud outbursts were heard starting with a simple 'what' and ending with strings of swear words.

"You are joking right?" Mundugrus asked.

"Unfourtunately I am not. Potter walked into a Death Eater meeting had a pleasant talk with the Dark Lord and then..."

Tonks looked completely shocked with her hair going a strange greenish colour "Then what?"

"Well the exact words were: Together we will rule the world, Lord Slytherin. Witness this union, the warriors of Darkness, this is the beginning of new era. The Age of Lords." Snape shook his head " Then Voldemort said something like : Bow before your dual masters, equal in power and command"

"What does it mean?" asked Mr. Weasley.

McGonagall shut her eyes in shame before speaking " We have a traitor on our hands, a very powerful traitor."

"Oh great it's all your fault, Dumbledore!" Remus shouted. He failed him, he failed to protect Harry he failed his words to not only to Sirius, but to James and Lily Remus thought. "You didn't even try to stop him!"

"He jumped out of that window so fast not even me or Harry's friends could blink, he didn't give us time to stop him." Dumbledore replied somewhat angrily , perhaps because he could feel the shame that he indeed was the one who was responsible.

"But, but.... " Remus was lost for words

"I don't understand, Harry what did he do?" asked one of the Aurors

Dumbledore replied slowly "He swapped sides, now we are all at risk. Harry is immensely powerful, something I am sure he only recently realised. If his powers are misused, he could end up like Voldemort himself."

Complete silence filled the room, not even a breath could be heard. Many had tears falling from their eyes, even Snape looked worried and miserable.

"What are we supposed to do now?" Remus asked not looking up. "We have definitely lost now."

"Don't say that! There is always hope, we must look for it that's all." Dumbledore said quickly wishing he could believe it too not just say it.

"How everything we hoped for was for Harry to summon enough strength to beat You-know-who. He is gone, what other hope is there?" asked a member at the end of the table.

Not even Dumbledore replied to this. They sat in silence for several minutes each lost in their personal thoughts and fears. Harry was the only thing they believed, the only person who could save them. He always did, to them it always seemed that couldn't change. As long as Harry was there, they could go on, but what now?

"How have his friends reacted to this?" Mad Eye asked finally " They were very close, weren't they?"

"In shock understandably, but they seem motionally stable. Most of the school is the same, I don't know what Potter thinks, but he has a lot of supporters at Hogwarts." Professor McGonagall replied.

"Didn't they have some sort of secret training club last year?" Mad-Eye asked bluntly "They could help."

"It was led by Harry, I doubt it will continue without him." Remus replied.

Dumbledore nodded slowly " I asked them today about it, they said they wished the club would continue, but they don't have a teacher."

"What are you suggesting?" Mundrugus asked "Get them a new teacher?"

"If some of you will be kind enough to come once in a while to just give a presentation, it might be very helpful." The Headmaster answered.

"That could be arranged." Replied Mad Eye. "How about we leave the matter for tonight? We are all too confused, on a recent development to think clearly."

There was a general mutter of agreement, there was nothing else discussed that night, most were merely enjoying the social chat between friends in the Order.

## Chapter Eight – Of Breakfasts and Nightmares

Harry leisurely opened his eyes, the surroundings gradually became less blurry. He chuckled realizing he had forgotten to take out his contacts the night before. While he was sleeping one of them slid out of place causing his vision to go crooked. He carefully adjusted it wincing slightly as it cut into his eyeball. Contacts had their advantages, but sometimes they became as frustrating as glasses.

He looked around the room, it seemed completely alien to him. It was certainly not anywhere in the Dursleys house, the room looked large enough to fit the whole No. 4, Privet drive inside it and still leave plenty of room. Hogwarts then? Harry doubted that even the most lavish rooms at the school could compare with this one. The Grimmaurd Place was much too dark for such a room; the Black's house was not open, with little sunlight coming in even in the brightest of days. Harry noticed the sunlight filling the room though the large windows. Harry shook his head muttering:

'Try to remember the date at least.'

Harry checked around for a calendar, but didn't find any. He was pretty sure it was early September, but he couldn't remember what day of the week it was or of the exact date. Frowning at the blanks in his memory he attempted to recount what occurred the day before. An image crossed his mind, a shining, golden ring with a blood red stone set in it. Harry scrambled in his pockets searching for it. He let out a relieved sigh as he took the ring out and placed it on his finger. It was now where it rightfully belonged, Harry would insure it would stay there at least until his death, if not after.

Harry returned to his thoughts of the previous night, he dimly remembered being somewhere up high shivering in the cold. Countless rivers, hills and villagers passed below as he waved in and out of the clouds. Then a dark dusty room began to appear in Harry's mind. A circle of people clothed in black robes with hoods pulled over their heads. All were masked with only their eyes showing, every one of them staring at the two figures in the centre. Harry stood there shoulder to shoulder with the Dark Lord himself.

Harry cursed lightly as the details of the night filled in the spaces. What was he thinking? Why did Voldemort accept him, How was Harry to get out of this mess now? Several other, just as irksome questions surfaced in Harry's mind. There was only one that scared him above the rest.

Why did he do it in the first place?

Harry wondered about it for several minutes before concluding, he had no answer. Even to himself his actions seemed completely and utterly irrational. Madness, that's what it was. Madness! Voldemort's worst enemy was here in Voldemort's house, unharmed. Was Harry going insane? Or was it Voldemort? Or maybe both of them were? After what Harry pulled off yesterday and what Voldemort let him do they might as well be send to St. Mungo's. That would be the perfect place for both them.

Harry shrugged, it wasn't probably the best time to phantom about his or anyone else's sanity. He couldn't stay in the same house as Lord Voldemort that would be suicide. Not to mention the passing Death Eaters could easily curse Harry to death without a second thought. He had to leave, as soon as possible.

Harry jumped out of the bed and realised he didn't bother to change the night before; he even had his shoes on. His school robes were now crumpled; he didn't look anywhere near decent. Not that it particularly mattered at that moment. Harry looked around closely inspecting his surroundings.

The bed stood right in the middle with everything else around it. Harry had to muse how exactly did he manage not to fall off it during the night, it looked like the only way you can climb on it was to use a ladder. The room itself looked bigger than a full sized Basketball Court, Harry wondered how big must the whole house be. On one side the wall was covered with shelves overflowing with books. Harry wasn't a bookworm, but he still enjoyed reading once in a while. Managing to turn his gaze away he noticed a carpeted area to the left of the bed, the rest of the floor was wooden. Harry assumed it was just for comfort, but it looked like a sort of a training area for martial arts or something of that kind.

In one corner stood a large desk, right next to the fireplace, empty apart from one or two quills scattered around. Harry turned back towards the bookshelves; he saw a small coffee table and two lounges facing each other. Harry paused, there was only one way out, through the door, but Voldemort wasn't stupid, he would probably posted guards right behind it Harry maybe he turned towards the windows, maybe there is a way, a chance he could jump out? Harry opened one of them and looked down. It was at least twenty metres down. Harry might have been lucky in the past, but he wasn't sure about trying to jump out of a window, he didn't like pushing his luck too far.

'Let me see, a – I could stay here reading waiting for them to come and get me, b – Attempt to leave via the door or c – Test how many bones can I break in one jump.' Harry said sarcastically.

His seemed to flicker in a triangle, from the bookshelf to the door to the window then start again. Harry tried to remember if there were any spells to slow down a person falling. There was little that came to mind apart from Oliver teaching Harry the best way to fall from a broom. Speaking of brooms, where was his Firebolt? Harry span around searching wildly, the broom was his ticket out of the house, back to the safety of Hogwarts. Harry couldn't find it anywhere; he had left it on the floor somewhere the night before.

Harry heard a soft knock on the door. He felt like his heart froze for a few seconds, he didn't dare to move. There was another knock, a tad louder the second time followed by a squeaky voice that sounded like a house-elf's.

'Is sir sleeping? Wake up sir.'

Harry was at loss, he could pretend he was asleep, but eventually someone would open the door and find him anyway. He might as well get it over and done with quickly. He took out his wand and with a very shaky voice said

'Come in.'

Immediately the door swung open, revealing a lone, frightened looking house-elf standing in the doorway holding a piece of clothing.

'Master wants sir to join master for breakfast, master says sir needs a change of clothes, sir.' The elf squiggled quickly. Harry realized the elf was holding a pair of jeans and a t-shirt.

'Thank-you, wait for me to change then take me to your master.' Harry said as politely as possible, he grabbed the clothes and slammed the door nearly hitting the house elf. Harry leaned against the door, he couldn't believe himself.

He stared at the clothes in his hands; pants would be a lot easier to fight in than robes, which tend to go everywhere during quick movements. He hurriedly stuffed on the jeans and the shirt leaving his uniform on the floor. Harry placed his wand in the side pocket so he could take it out swiftly if needed. Breathing in deeply he twisted the handle of the door, creaking slightly it opened.

'I am ready, lets go.' Harry said calmly. The house-elf nodded meekly and beckoned Harry to follow. They walked down several staircases eventually reaching the kitchen. Harry saw a man working around the stove; he paid no attention to Harry or the elf. Harry checked around for any Death Eaters creeping up on him from behind. He saw at least three exits out of the kitchen and sharp knives close by. He settled down a little deciding he could defend himself well enough if the need arose.

He reached to adjust his lenses once more, for a second he stared at the reflection of himself in one of the pots. The reflection wasn't perfect, but it was clear enough to show his eyes glow with a strange silver light.

The house-elf left silently as the man in front of the stove turned around. Harry gazed around, with everything he was ever told about the Dark Lord no one mentioned him cooking. Harry wished he had Colin's camera with him; the picture would have made the front cover of the Daily Prophet for sure.

'Oh Harry, you are here. The breakfast is almost ready.' Tom said cheerfully, Harry wondered if all the food served would be poisoned. He watched Voldemort take out freshly baked bread from the oven, then put the omelette onto separate plates

'Harry, can you help me set up the table?' Voldemort asked smiling and humming a tune to himself. Harry picked up the closest plate and followed Tom out of one of the doors. Harry was confused to see another Dining room; different from the one they used the previous night. Harry put the plate on the table and returned to the kitchen. It took several more trips to bring everything needed to the table.

Voldemort sat down at the head of the table leaving Harry to choose his place from the other six seats. They sat in silence not touching the food, eventually a few others appeared too. Harry ended up sitting between Bellatrix Lestrange and Percy Weasley. Malfoy, Pettigrew and Nott sat opposite them. In the usual manner Malfoy didn't wait for anyone else and straight away started buttering the bread.

Harry looked over at Voldemort while spreading jam on his toast, the Dark Lord seemed in a good mood as he was singing something very softly. No one was speaking which annoyed Harry, he was used to chatting while eating.

'Great food, Tom; do you always cook?' Harry finally said breaking the silence

'Only once a month and every Death Eater has to struggle to get a spot at the table.' Nott replied not setting his eyes of the bacon. He had been eating like he went hungry for a month and now came to a feast. Harry nodded lightly.

'Did you sleep well?' Pettigrew asked Malfoy. Lucius ignored the question muttering something that sounded like 'Rotten Rat'. On the other side of the table Percy was having trouble cutting up his sausages.

'Don't you know any manners, my son had better etiquette at five then you do as an adult.' Lucius Malfoy groaned. Everyone looked up, Malfoy was famous for starting fights for petty reasons, but at this



table everyone was meant to be civil to each other. Voldemort continued eating and the Death Eaters didn't dare to anger him.

'Do you need some help?' Pettigrew asked calmly. The sausage skin was very tough as he himself found out not long ago and Percy's knife was awfully blunt. Percy shook his head going red.

'Well, if you are sure.' Pettigrew said.

'Leave him be, everyone must learn their manners eventually.' Nott urged. Percy went even redder and put down his fork.

'Your parents were too poor to have eating utensils; you probably ate with your hands all your life. Like a wild animal.' Bellatrix said, Harry wondered if he should defend Percy, but decided against it. Wormtail too, preferred to ignore the rest and continued eating. The other Death Eaters went on taunting Percy, forgetting that Tom was watching their every move. Tom was visibly getting angry as Lucius began to call Percy names.

'Maybe you should include the host in your conversation?' Harry asked. He didn't care for the Death Eaters bickering between themselves, but Voldemort should not be ignored like that. The others took the hint and dropped back to talking about Politics. Percy muttered a barely audible 'Thank-you' to Harry who ignored it pretending he was too busy with his food.

Eventually everyone present his or her meal, by then Harry was about to fall asleep. No matter how much Harry detested Fudge the discussion of what way to kill the Minister was entertaining only for a short while. Surprisingly though Malfoy and Lestrange turned out to be the cruelest at the table, Voldemort wanted a quick death. Bellatrix however kept suggesting medieval styles of torture while Malfoy was bent on using the most painful spells in existence. Harry himself had suggested pouring liquid oxygen down the Minister's throat. He was pretty sure he had studied the properties oxygen in its different states when he attended a Muggle school, result shouldn't be bad. The Death Eaters laughed, but decided it was too Muggle to be used by them.

One by one people excused themselves and left. Harry was waiting for this moment. Harry watched the house elves cleared the table and then moved to sit closer to the Dark Lord.

'Did you enjoy my cooking?' Tom asked, Harry stared up at him. Tom frowned but soon began laughing, Harry joined in.

'Never imagined I'd see the Dark Lord cooking. If you'd been wearing an apron as well you would have looked like a real housewife.' Harry burst out.

'Never thought I'd see you sitting at the same table as those monsters.' Voldemort replied.' Although I have to say, you are much more civilised.'

Harry managed to calm himself down a little. 'Don't tell me you do this repeatedly?'

'Unfortunately yes, it has it's uses. I can see who'll never get along together. I believe today's winners are Malfoy and Weasley.' Voldemort said, as always his Death Eaters embarrassed him in front of more important guests.

'Oh, what I surprise. Who would have thought those two would turn out to be enemies.' Harry said sarcastically.

Voldemort smiled threateningly. 'You know I don't think Malfoy's punishment is over, his next task would be to clean out the cells of Azkaban with Weasley as his partner.

'Don't be surprised if you find a corpse or two in there after they finish with each other.' Harry warned

'One more Death Eater, one less, no one will care. They are about as useful as rats; they breed like rats too. Who do you think will win if Malfoy and Weasley tried to duel?' Voldemort asked, he didn't have a high opinion of his servants, but he doubted they had a good opinion of him.

'I can't stand Malfoy and I hate to say it, but I think he'll win. Percy is not much of a dueller as far as I can remember.' Harry smirked 'Five galleons Malfoy wins?'

'All right, remind me sometime about it if I forget.' Voldemort said. 'It's just hilarious how the Ministry still assumes Azkaban is under their control.'

Harry blinked, the news were new to him in spite of his doubts about Dementors remaining loyal to the Ministry. 'Are you saving them for the attack on Hogwarts?' Harry asked.

'It a bit of a waste to use them before that, it would ruin the element of surprise for Dumbledore's little Army or how ever he wants to call it. And Death Eaters as a rule throw people off what they are doing, that would give us an enormous advantage.' Voldemort stated. 'The battle will be chaotic if the Dementors come into play and that's always bad for the enemy.'

Harry scowled at he memories of how the Dementors affected him. If there were enough for the whole school to be affected they their victory is nearly complete. The only thing they will have to do is to kill all those who are not already dead, an easy task for the Death Eaters.

'Harry, do you have the Gryffindor Ring?' Voldemort added suddenly serious. Harry nodded and raised his hand to show off the heirloom. Voldemort smiled and showed his ring. The Slytherin Ring was almost identical in design except it was silver and the stone set in it was an emerald not a ruby.

'Never take it off, there are many people who'll do anything to get their hands on it.' Tom declared 'I don't know about me, but with your ring you can break every defence set on Hogwarts. Infact you can take the castle apart stone by stone and no one would be able to stop you.'

'Speaking of defences, I've noticed yesterday the house seems a lot smaller from the outside. Is there a spell made to do that?'

'Not quite, the room we are in now is part of the Slytherin Castle somewhere in Northern Wales. Yes, you did enter through my father's house that I brought some years ago. The meeting was held there, but afterwards we travelled here.' Tom replied, Harry was only more confused.

'I don't remember travelling at all.' He muttered.

'There is a magical link that only I can activate; the spell is complicated so it's not well known. It makes the link so strong that most don't notice it at all.' Voldemort explained. 'Makes it harder for the ministry to find me.'

'Can you apparate out of this house?' Harry asked

'No, there are no roads leading here either. We are surrounded by one of the largest forests in Britain. The only way to get here is by air, that link and Floo powder. Actually there are spells which protect the house from the air making it invisible.' Voldemort said

Harry was amazed grasping the fault in Voldemort's plan. 'But it's easy to track movements through Floo travel.'

'No, if they check someone who is travelling here the Ministry will see places like Leaky Cauldron, Hogwarts, Hogsmeade come up.' Voldemort argued 'This place has as many spells, charms and curses on it as Hogwarts.'

'And that other place, you said it was your father's?' Harry asked, he thought he had seen it once in a dream, but he wasn't sure.

'Yes it's a Muggle place. I only recently put basic protection on it. It's still open for Apparation and there are new cells for prisoners installed, but it's Muggle they won't think of checking it. Voldemort sad. Personally he loathed the Riddle House, but since he brought it off some poor Muggle decades ago it became too good of an opportunity to waste.

'And the muggles?' Harry said

'Even since I got rid of my dear family there fifty years ago or maybe longer now, they are too scared to come near it. I think they are scared of ghosts. Voldemort laughed. Harry grinned inwardly thinking up of numerous jokes he could play on the Muggles.

'Okay last question, can Death Eaters come in here if they need to?'

'Yes, now and then they come straight here if I need something personal from them.' Voldemort replied 'they don't stay long.

'At least I can get away from those dogs then.'

'I better show you around the house, there are no moving staircases, but plenty of secret rooms and passages.' Tom urged yawning

'Great, now I need to learn to navigate in another maze.' Harry groaned.

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Ginny sat in front of the fire. The chair was not predominantly comfortable, but she didn't want to doze off either. The last Griffondors were heading to bed, leaving their homework, games and other rubbish scattered around. Ginny sighed she has a History of magic essay to write, but her mind just wasn't up to it. How unfair, she got four essays on the first week back, OWL year or not, the teachers were had no compassion at all.

At last Ginny understood what was so bad about the chair. Third left from the fireplace, Harry's favourite. Ginny closed her eyes; don't think about it, you are only making it worse for yourself. But there was no way she could get the images out of her head. Harry lying unconscious on his bed, Harry struggling to defend him-self in the Ministry, Harry in the Chamber of Secrets, Harry, Harry, Harry... Ginny felt like crying, there were so many memories. Where was Harry now?

Clenching her fists Ginny inhaled deeply, Harry was smart enough to stay out of trouble or if he did get into a mess he was lucky enough to

get out of it. The only thing they needed to be afraid is Harry trying to kill himself again, Ginny trembled as a memory crept up to the surface of her mind, and it wasn't encouraging at all.

She decided she might as well go to bed; she was not going to get anything done. Instead she'd probably fall asleep during lessons the next day and get in trouble with her teachers. She was about to leave when she heard someone coming down from the boy's staircase. Slowly Neville came into view. He was wearing yellow pyjamas that looked too big for him, his hair an absolute mess.

'Hey.' He sat shyly sitting down in the chair next to Ginny, she smiled.

'Hi.'

'What are you doing here so late?' Neville asked glancing at the clock on the wall, it clearly showed it was a long time past midnight.

'Can't sleep.' Ginny answered. 'Plus I have homework to do.'

'Join the club.' Neville said his mouth turning into a warm grin as he offered her his hand. Faking it Ginny asked.

'So what's the name of the club and what's it for?'

'No idea, I suppose it's for every insomniac in the school.' Neville replied carelessly, both he and Ginny laughed.

Turning more serious Neville said 'What's bothering you?'

Whatever trace of happiness there was on Ginny's face before instantly vanished. Neville wondered if he had said the wrong thing. Studying the girl Neville noticed for the first time how attractive she was, no wonder half the guys in the school were drooling over her.

'A lot of things.' Ginny replied at last. She felt somewhat proud to come up with an answer that told everything and nothing at the same time.

'No different with me.' Neville replied

For a minute or so they were content with just sitting not speaking at all. The silence was comforting in it's own way as each wondered if they dared to ask the next question.

'Why did it have to be us who found him?' Neville finally muttered half-heartedly.

Ginny listened to the soft chiming of the clock. 'I don't know, we were the nearest. It's just our luck.' She replied sounding very forced. 'At least I don't have to enter it again if I don't want to.'

'Yeah, every time I go in there I can almost see the blood again. I was cleaning it up, but it seemed like I couldn't wash it off, not even with magic no matter how hard I tried. There is a stench of decaying flesh in there, but I am the only one who noticed.' Neville replied cringing.

Ginny wondered if she had ever heard Neville speak so much at any one time, she decided he was always too quiet, even during DA lessons when his abilities seemed to shine their best.

'Is that why you can't sleep?' Ginny said delicately. She barely knew Neville, so she didn't want to push him into telling her more then he was comfortable with. Neville was already telling her his deepest secrets.

He faltered slightly. 'That's part of, but never was a particularly great sleeper anyway. On average I have a nightmare at least once or twice a week.'

'Strange, Ron always complained about Harry not letting him sleep because of his nightmares. Ron never mentioned you having any.' Ginny replied. She considered what if there was something more to Neville then his clumsiness and bad marks in Potions.

'Harry can easily wake up half of the school with his yells; even Ron wouldn't sleep through that. Your brother is a heavy sleeper though; he won't be able to hear me. I don't scream my head off, instead I wake up sobbing like a baby.' Neville said then added 'Suspiciously enough, they are often on the same night as Harry's.'

'Hey, lets make I deal, if one of us has a nightmare we talk about it.' Ginny suggested thinking what precisely was she doing proposing that.

'Okay.' Neville nodded nervously. 'You want to start now?' He looked at the clock again; there were several hours until sunrise, plenty of time for talk.

'I'll start then. I had nightmares since the Chamber of Secrets episode. I keep dreaming Harry didn't come to help me; I was just left down there to die, having to watch him getting stronger and stronger. ' Ginny said.' Then he says something to me, but I can't hear properly. Maybe he is talking in another language, I don't know.'

'And when you wake up?' Neville asked, suddenly it seemed like a form of a therapy session or something similar.

'It's usually after he says whatever he says; I often end up on the floor shaking from head to toe. I probably just fall out of my bed while dreaming, but yeah.' Ginny replied, Neville quietly chuckled imaging her on the floor.

'I can divide my nightmares into groups, there are ones about my parents, then there are the ones about You-know-who. When I was younger I would only have the first kind, but when I can to Hogwarts the You-know-who ones became more and more numerous.' Neville said warily.

'Do you think it has something to do with him getting stronger?' Ginny asked,

'Dunno, it's possible. But, sometimes when Harry would have his quirks in the middle of the day, I would feel something too. This aching pain, not strong but it was there. I used to be afraid, me and Harry were connected in some way.' Neville muttered incoherently. Ginny was the first person he had ever told, not even his grandmother knew or any of his uncles. Ginny paused; everyone assumed that Harry was the only one weird enough to have dreams like that. 'Maybe it had nothing to do with Harry at all, maybe its



T...You-know-who,' Ginny mumbled going red. Even after four year she still occasionally referred to He-who-must-not-be-named as Tom Riddle. It didn't bother her all that much, but other people often had no idea what she was talking about.

Neville seemed thoughtful. "You are probably right, but that's an even scarier suggestion, having a connection with the same man who is the cause of my parent's insanity.'

'It's horrible.' Ginny agreed.' It's so many years since he possessed me, but sometimes I can feel something stirring in the back of my head. I think it's him trying to break in again.'

'What I can't understand is why is it that our families and friends that have to die, what have we done?'

'Maybe it's just because we are Gryffindors, for centuries we were bent to righting the wrongs. Death and misery is like our second symbol, without it we won't be Gryffindors.' Ginny didn't know where were the words coming from, she went on letting it flow. ' Now he is trying to destroy us by driving us insane, he can't kill us physically yet. But he is playing us against our ourselves.'

'It's Harry he really wants, why Ron and Hermione don't feel this then? The three of them are the best of friends, why aren't they affected?' Neville asked, there were so many 'Why' s.

Ginny shook her head, she was fifteen she was no expert.' Neither Ron nor Hermione have ever directly suffered from him, you and I have. We know what Harry feels a lot better then they do.'

'And the Death Eaters saw us last year in the Ministry.' Neville agreed a dark look crossing his face ' You-know-who had made us the victims, we have to suffer from the consequences of what he does.'

'Neville, what do you see exactly?' Ginny asked. For second in front of her sat a boy so closely resembling Harry she wondered if they were related. The features didn't match, their complexions were different, but as Neville looked at her she saw the same look Harry often wore. Over the years she had spent enough time looking at the

boy-who-lived to know what that meant, the pain and the suffering surfaced from the memories, with it came anger, frustration and the urge for revenge. Neville was the last person she ever imagined even having that look.

'Neville?' she whispered, he was almost in a light trance. Instantly snapping out of it he said

'Different, sometimes it's You-know-who talking to someone; other times he is torturing people. It's never clear, like someone put a thick wall between me and him, but I can still hear the echoes of what is going on.'

Ginny said nothing, she regretted never asking what Harry's dreams were like, probably similar.

'I am sorry Ginny, you have plenty of your problems on your own, you don't need me and my soupy dilemmas.' Neville stuttered.

'It's fine, it's better sometimes to listen to other people's dilemmas, gets your mind off your own.' Ginny said quickly.' Not to mention I think we have the same problems anyway.'

'Yeah.' Neville agreed uncertainly, he yawned; it was really late now or early, whichever you want to look at it. The last sparks of the fire were dying out, there was no more firewood to add. He doubted he could stay awake much longer, but he didn't want to bother the other boys in his dormitory.

'I wanted to tell you for a while now, you were really brave last year.' Ginny said 'Your parents would have been proud.'

Even in the growing dark she could see Neville going bright red.' I broke the prophecy.' He cried out.

'It was only a glass ball, probably made by some fake like Trawenley if not worse and now You-know-who can't have it either. Another frustration to the dear Dark Lord, one point to the good side.' Ginny said

Neville laughed silently, he imagined a giant scoreboard sat somewhere in Dumbledore's office. The Headmaster would be eating his favourite brand of lollies and sticking little five pointed, gold stars on different sides depending on who won or lost the last skirmish. Ginny stood up and moved closer to Neville, it was cold in the Common Room; winter was coming fast. They giggled softly remembering the Yule Ball to years ago. Neville began to sing one of the newer songs by the Weird Sisters in a clear tenor voice as Ginny began to drift off her head resting on his shoulder. Smiling Neville stroked her hair and closed his eyes.

## Chapter Nine – Of Names and Plots

'I can't believe it, he was sleeping with my sister!' Ron said loudly during breakfast the next day. He was still very much in shock from seeing Ginny in Neville's arms when he came down to the Common Room on his way to breakfast. He knew perfectly well, he was overprotective of Ginny, but come on she was his only sister. But Neville, Neville and Ginny? It just seemed absurd!

Hermione was trying to calm Ron down, although she didn't have a lot of success. She was obviously surprised by what she saw, but she wasn't stupid she saw plenty of times how Ginny and Neville looked at each other. Plus who knows, they might have actually been telling the truth and they were just talking.

'Come off it Ron, it's not the end of the world, besides it could have been a Slytherin.' Hermione urged, silently hoping Ron would come down soon, she was getting tired of being the mediator.

Ron suddenly; looked malicious.' A Slytherin with my sister, over my dead body!'

Hermione thought that the only good thing was that neither Ginny nor Neville would be with them during their next lesson. Ginny obviously was a year younger and Neville didn't get high enough marks to get into the NEWT Potion class. Right that moment Ron and Hermione were standing right outside the door to the Potions lab, ten minutes early as usual, just to be safe. The other few Gryffindors who managed to get into the class as well were also there trying to ignore the Slytherins.

'Hey what happened with Ron and Ginny, they looked a bit embarrassed at breakfast for some reason.' Dean asked brightly. Hermione quickly filled him in on the most important details largely leaving out Ron's very creative reaction. Dean was still laughing his head off when Snape finally and silently opened the door to let them in.

Every Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw hurriedly walked in and tried to find a spot as far back as he or she could. The Slytherins however continued their conversations into the room while slowly

proceeding to their seats up in the front. Everyone could see that Malfoy didn't even bother to bring his cauldron to the lesson.

Snape looked around the class; why did he have to teach Potions? Couldn't he teach defence Against the Dark Arts or Charms or even History of Magic? Sure he loved Potions, but the little rats were hopeless. They weren't worth the effort he had to put in. Frowning he decided to start. Here goes another lesson, another lecture, another set of Potion ingredients wasted. Snape quickly explained the background of the latest potion and put the procedure on the board; groaning softly the class got to work. Snape smirked; already he saw Dean put in a wrong ingredient, but didn't want to correct the boy. It would be the Gryffindor's fault if the Potion blew up. Snape strolled around the classroom looking for a person to pick on, he realized Malfoy was sitting in the front row, smoking.

Even Snape was shocked.' Put that out, it's a disgusting habit and a Muggle one if you don't realize.'

Malfoy threw the cigarette away in revulsion; he hated to be associated with anything Muggle. He muttered an arrogant 'Sorry' not even remotely sounding like he meant it.

'Where are your things Mr. Malfoy?' Snape asked, he was getting annoyed; Malfoy didn't even bring a quill and parchment let alone a cauldron and potion ingredients.

Malfoy put on his best gentlemen smile and said. ' I don't have them here.'

'Then go and get them, you have three minutes! Otherwise I'll give you a months worth of detentions in the Forbidden Forest whether your father agrees with it or not.' Professor Snape snarled making sure he looked as intimidating as possible. Malfoy gulped and run out of the classroom leaving Snape smiling satisfied with the fact the was still scary after all those years. You'd think they would have gotten used to it by now. The rest of the class laughed, in their opinion there was no finer entertainment then seeing Malfoy get what he deserved.

'Get on with your work!' Snape shouted.

No matter how much he hated the job, he would not tolerate that kind of behaviour in his class. Although it was rather amusing too see the snotty, Death Eater in making be scared out of his wits like that. Snape had heard of a detention Draco had to do in his first year, Filch was very keen on providing the details. Turning around Snape sat back down on his chair making sure that no one in the class dared to breathe louder then absolutely necessary.

His eyes fell on the couple sitting at the very back. Even with the Professor's ignorance of the school rumours even he had heard that granger and Weasley had recently figured their relationship out. Even in class they were constantly holding hands and there were bets going around the school as to which class will be the first one where they decide to pash each other. Snape sincerely hoped it wouldn't be in the middle of his, he had seen enough snogging in class from Lilly and James in his years. They never cared about what was appropriate and what wasn't. Yep, Potter really, well he was a git that much was always obvious. Lily, she was nicer, but why did she get involved with Potter?

Snape returned back to the reality just in time to hear the more out going Slytherins taunt Weasley and Granger about Harry's disappearance. The Potions Master wondered if what he should do. He could easily kick the bullies out of the class, but that will eventually reach the Death Eaters. They'll be curious why their children were punished and perhaps see it as a betrayal to the Dark Lord. Snape could just sit and let them continue with their petty squabbles. Again the Headmaster would be disappointed and Snape himself was not a completely heartless man as most of the school assumed. He had compassion in him and that that moment he felt the two Gryffindors had more then enough to deal with.

Snape had to remind himself however that those two were the reminded of the once glorious 'Dream team', which used to be headed by none other but by the son of one of the Marauders. Snape could tell that the red head was getting angry. Jokes about his family didn't amuse him much; soon he would attack one of the bullies.

Snape smirked, the solution was obvious, ignore the whole thing. He left the room and started sorting out the new potion ingredients that have arrived to his office earlier in the morning. Sure enough two minutes later he heard angry shouts and slams on the floor. Gryffindors had chosen to fight the muggle way, perhaps to their advantage. Most Slytherins were trained to duel with magic, but few bothered to learn how to punch.

Snape laughed darkly, he could only wonder how many noses would be broken by the end of the fight and how many Potions would be spilled on the floor. By the sounds Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs decided it was not an opportunity to miss. All for Potter, if you looked Harry, you would have seen just how many wonderful friends you have.

To Snape's frustration he heard Minerva McGonagall shriek to stop a few seconds later. That woman had no sense of humour what so ever.

'That's it, two hundred points each off both Gryffindor and Slytherin! One hundred off Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw since I have no doubts you wouldn't have been daft enough to start this massacre!' She shouted, all sounds stopped. Snape looked over at the graph showing the house points that stood on his table (every teacher had one in his office). Gryffindor and Slytherin were in the negatives. Maybe this would be the year the less prominent Houses take the House cup, who knows these days. He heard McGonagall ask who was the teacher. Professor Snape decided it was time to appear back into the picture. Returning to class he saw most of his students leaving to go and see Madam Pomfrey. Very few of them managed to avoid some sort of injury, to those left Snape gave a lasting lecture about behaviour in the classroom and gave them detention. He knew perfectly well they didn't start it, but he had a reputation to own up to.

The classroom it-self looked like both the Marauders and the Weasley twins had some fun with it. It would be a nightmare to clean it up; fortunately it was the caretaker's job. Another reason to annoy Filch.

It was however the only thing that made his day decent. Madam Pomfrey ordered Snape to make a multitude of potions for the

Hospital Wing after his students used up most of her stocks. The dinner was mashed potato, which Severus didn't particularly enjoy. He always imagined it it mashed brain he was eating, not potato. He didn't know where that idea came from, but it put his off his food.

And as always, the Dark Lord decided to end Snape's day in complete misery, another Death Eater meeting after dinner. Snape wondered why the Dark Lord had such a knack for setting his meetings on precisely the days when the Potions Master had other plans. Snape had things to do; he was a teacher after all.

Snape was worried even more than usual, he didn't know if the dark Lord was aware of his being a spy or not. Harry could have told Lord Voldemort everything he knew about the order and Snape was sure Potter realised he was a spy some time or other. He remembered a conversation they had last year during one of their Occumancy practises.

'It's not up to you to find out what the Dark Lord is saying to his Death Eaters.'

'No – that's your job isn't it?'

Snape felt he had no choice but to attend, since he already missed the 'Monthly Breakfast'. Stepping through the fireplace he grimly considered that the last people who he would see would be Death Eaters who knew he was a traitor his death would be very lengthy and painful. A fate perhaps not too different from the Longbottoms, only his life would end in death, not insanity.

Snape sat down in his designated space amidst the others, this time the chairs were actually provided. Snape noticed two chairs a lot larger than the rest up in the front. The chairs were richly carved out of dark wood; they matched in design as if they were made only to stand next to each other not for any other purpose. The other Death Eaters were talking between themselves. Snape himself was sitting between which he knew nothing about; he couldn't even remember their names. Severus didn't particularly want to start the conversation so he settled down for quiet ignoring people unless they bothered to talk to him first.



The door to the room swang open and a teenager entered. He wore slightly glittery black robes; similar to what the Death Eaters wore only more expensive looking. He sat down on one of the throne like chairs looking arrogant enough to rival even Malfoy. Snape was the only one to notice their New Dark Lord come in as the conversations continued Harry sat silently listening intensely. Innocent remarks can have great impacts; as far as Harry was concerned casual conversations were great in helping find the traitors. He noticed a Death Eater staring back at him, Harry noted to mention to Voldemort who was the spy. Snape is going to pay for everything he did to Harry over the years.

'You.' Crabbe suddenly said noticing Harry at last.

'Yes me.' Harry retorted and added. 'And add "sir" or "lord" when talking to me.'

'Why should we? You are only a kid.' Nott snorted.

'I might be younger than you by several years, but I am still the Dark Lord's favourite.' Harry replied. He knew that this kind of argument would arise sometime and he would have to deal with it in the appropriate manner. 'Speaking of the Dark lord, he appointed me your official baby sitter until he decides to show up. He said I can use any method I like to shut you up and I just happen to know some very creative methods of torture I want to try out.'

Snape gulped, when Potter or any person spoke in that tone it was plain he was entirely serious. To his confusion the rest were not as quick in understanding the fact, they started to throw insults about Harry's parents. The teenager ignored them lightly tapping his fingers on the chair leg. He moved only when someone cried out.

'And what would you like us to do, Lord Potter? Change your nappy for you?'

'Don't call me that, if you treasure your life.' Harry shouted

'Then how are we supposed to call you? The big-traitor-that-supposed-to-be-the-boy-who-lived.' Maclair piped in, the others burst out laughing, and even Snape chuckled softly. Harry felt he had to consider it; he didn't want anyone calling him Harry Potter or the-boy-who-lived. That was all in the past, he was a different person now, whatever could be removed from his previous life had to go immediately. He opened his mouth unsure what to say.

'My name.' As if an inward voice spoke from inside him perfectly clearly he stated. 'My name is Lord Arhimar.'

Harry blinked, where did that come from. He had never heard of any such name before in his life.

'Lord what?' Avery asked stupidly.

Harry replied 'Arhimar, you better remember that you dumbwits.'

'Yes Lord Arhimar.' The Death Eaters chorused together, once again resembling school children.

'Unless you prefer to call me "Lucifer" of-course.' Lord Arhimar smirked ' Now will obey my every command, without question. If I tell you to throw yourself off a cliff you will do it. It is your training for battle.'

'Battle? You are going to order us in battle!' Malfoy asked

'Yes, that's part of the whole thing with be being a Dark Lord.' Arhimar said with a snarling look on his face. Could the Death Eaters get any stupider, they had just enough brains to listen to commands. If Voldemort were to lead multiple attacks at one time they would never be allowed to stay in charge of themselves. Snape swore beneath his breath, not far away he heard Malfoy do the same thing. The Scar-head was going to stick around for a while. Again a death Eater decided to question Harry's standing with in the circle, this time it was Bellatrix who spoke.

'You expect us to believe that you can lead an army when you can't even manage to cast a Criatous?'

This time Arhimar felt Bellatrix hit a soft spot. He didn't want to remember that particular accident. He grabbed his wand and shouted

'Crucio!'

The spell hit its mark; with in mili-seconds Lestledge was screaming her lungs out her husband standing behind her at loss at what to do.

'It's not that pleasant when you feel it, don't you think?" Just because I wasn't strong enough then, doesn't mean I can't do it now.' Arhimar stated lifting the spell. Even Crabbe and Goyle understood that that was the last warning. Any more violations and people might just start turning up in ditches, dead.

'Wormtail!' Lord Arhimar called. One of the Death Eaters came forward trembling. 'You sacrificed your flesh for Lord Voldemort; few in this room would have dome the same. You are loyal to the Dark Lord; will me as you serve him?'

Wormtail could hardly refuse, Death Eaters were rarely given any choices, plus there was the whole dept thing to think about. And if that wasn't sufficient reason, he was also Lily and James' son.

'Yes my lord. I will be honoured to be at your service.' He muttered bowing

'Kiss my feet.' Arhimar ordered, Pettigrew did as he was told although his expression looked for from happy 'Why is everyone waiting, you should have done this the second you came in.'

The cursing and the swearing were perfectly audible, but everyone grudgingly followed the commands. Snape was the last, after Percy Weasley.

'Severus, a second.' Lord Arhimar asked

Snape bowed as low as he could hoping the fear in his eyes didn't show behind his mask.' Yes, my lord.'

'Tell our dear bumblebee, the end is coming soon.' Arhimar said, Snape nodded and marched back to his place.

'Wormtail, go and find Tom for me, he seems to be late.'

'No need, I am right on time.' Voldemort said from the door. He was listening to the conversation for a while ready to step in if absolutely necessary. It was hilarious to watch his little pets in such dismay, but they should get used to the changes sooner or later.

Lord Gryffindor and Lord Slytherin.

One name considered good the other evil. Relatively speaking of-course, as far as Tom cared power was the only thing that truly mattered. Oh, how could he forget, Tom Riddle and Harry Potter Those particular names definitely didn't suit their owners and should be discarded immediately. He had actually been successful at that, after about fifty year or so the name 'Tom Riddle' seemed alien to him.

'Tom?' Harry whispered. The Dark Lord had been standing with a point blank expression on his face for some time. Voldemort decided that there was some dignity left in him still collapsing into the chair next to Lord Arhimar he asked 'Should we go on?'

Harry leaned in to whisper 'The spy, its Snape'

Voldemort stared for a second before understanding, pretending to glance at his watch as his insides bubbled with happiness he said calmly

'It's getting late, time for us to leave.'

Most of the Death Eaters relaxed, it was a strange night, and they wanted to go home. They disappeared quickly leaving the Dark Lords alone.

'The spy, that's the spy? Dumbledore's spy is Snape?' Voldemort said wildly

'It's rather obvious when you think about it.' Arhimar shrugged.

'It's too obvious for Dumbledore.' Voldemort laughed. 'What are we going to do about tomorrow? We have to kill Snape now.'

'No don't.' Arhimar argued 'he could be valuable, if we fed him the wrong information.'

'Okay, we just don't summon him tonight.' Voldemort sighed; treachery was never a good thing, even if it was for a cause 'Do you have the spell?'

Harry lifted out a piece of parchment from his pocket, with a few messy words written on it. 'I can't guarantee it, but it's worth a try.'

Voldemort muttered something half in Latin, half in Parcel-tongue. Soon the Death Eaters were returning appearing confused.

'Excuse us for the delay, we had to sort out one or two things before we could start.' Lord Arhimar said sternly, he didn't care if the others were sick, busy or tired. It was their problem.

We have found the whereabouts of our dear Minister and his family for tomorrow. This is our chance to get rid of him one and for all.' Voldemort stated.

The Death Eaters were cheering; the Minister of Magic was not their most favourite man. Short instructions followed mainly concerning the location, time and so on.

'Now go, tomorrow we will show the world the power, but tonight we prepare.' Lord Voldemort said. The Death Eaters groaned they were hoping the attack would happen that very night, they left again very frustrated.

Lucius especially was glowing with anger; he was going to bed when they were called the second time. Malfoy Senior had a rotten day and he desperately wanted some sleep. Instead he had to listen to the Potter boy the whole evening.

'Who does he think he is, the filthy Mudblood lover.' Lucius groaned as he returned to the living room of the Malfoy Manor. He was glad to be home, it might be cold and dark had it has the old Malfoy style to it.

'Father?' Draco said suddenly, he was standing a metre away from Lucius staring at the older man questioningly.

'You should be at school.' Lucius said 'What are you doing here?'

'Mother asked me to come, I was just going back.' Draco said, it wasn't a lie he had learned long ago lying to his father had grave consequences. His mother did say in her latest letter that she would like to see him more often; Draco took that quite literally. In truth he just like to get away form the Gryffindors once in a while.

He now was wondering if the visit was worth it, his father was not in the best of moods. A quick glance could immediately inform anyone of that. Draco knew perfectly well to be careful when Malfoy Senior was like that.

'Everything all right?' Draco asked deciding sympathy is the way to go.

Lucius fell down on the nearest couch. 'The Potter kid is causing trouble again.'

Draco smirked 'Trouble again? Potter stopped causing trouble in the first place.'

'Potter thinks he is as important as the Dark Lord himself. What did he say he wanted to be called again?' Lucius paused thinking 'Lord Ar... something, no-one cares.'

'He is always looking for ways to draw attention to himself it's nothing knew.'

'Draco, is anyone else awake?' Lucius asked, there were things he wanted to discuss with his son personally and he wanted privacy.

'No, they are asleep or at least pretending to be.' Draco replied, he had learned the unspoken rules of the house. One of those included

not trusting anyone even with in the family. They were Slytherins after all, betrayal and treachery always prospered with in that house.

'I am afraid Potter is messing up our plans again.' Lucius said ' He is taking the place of the Dark Lord's second in command.'

'My place father, the one you promised me. You told me everything was set.' Draco snarled all his plans could be going down the drain that very second and his father would do nothing about it.

'I didn't see the little problem.' Lucius snapped back

'A little problem you say? It much more than that.' Draco retorted baring his teeth, He had great ambitions like every other Slytherin and now Potter turned up. Potter, of all people, his arch-enemy, it simply wasn't fair. His dreams, his fantasies would remain just that, fantasies. There must be something they could do.

'Get rid of Potter, I don't care how, just do it.' Draco burst out. Lucius was fuming at both his son and potter. He screamed

'Don't order me around!'

'What else am I supposed to do? This is important and you are doing nothing to help me!' Draco shouted back not caring if he woke up the whole neighbourhood. Lucius speculated if he had taught his son too well, Draco was arrogant beyond measure.

'And you think you are the only one who is going to suffer from this? I am going to have to stare at Potter every time we are called! I am going to have to follow his orders! I am not pleased with this either!' Lucius roared shaking the house to its foundations as his voice echoed far and wide. Draco took a moment and muttered.

'I am sorry, father, forgive me.'

'I am sorry too; I have promised you a lot of things over the years. Those promises are hard to turn into reality, but we are Malfoys, we can get out of any corner. Bribes, lies, love or murder but we will get out of this.' Lucius said quieting down.

'Malfoys, I am a Malfoy, I can do this.' Draco stated under his breath, he felt like he was giving him-self a pep talk.

'The simplest solution would be to eliminate him completely.' Lucius suggested. ' But it can't be traced back to us and he is most likely under heavy protection.

'Poison then?' Draco said hopefully, the Manor's secret rooms contained all sorts of wonderful mixtures; they were sure to find something usable.

'No, what's his greatest weakness? What does he want more then anything?' Lucius asked, if he was going to murder someone, he was going to do it properly.

'Family, he never had any family, he wants his family to love him.' Draco saw the obvious answer ' Love, he wants love.'

'That shouldn't be particularly hard; seduction is a beautiful thing. Love will destroy him.' Lucius grinned evilly, he had already worked out the plan, his key is just up-stairs. No potions, no charms, no glamour spells, a sharp blade or a wand would be perfectly fine.



## Chapter Ten - Of Tradition and Casualties

Dear Mr. Dumbledore,

By your inquiry we have checked Mr. Potter's account. The ring in question is indeed missing from the vault and one of our staff recounts Mr. Potter collecting it during his last visit to Gringotts Bank.

Yours sincerely,

Fippawick

Gringotts Bank (Diagon Alley)

Albus Dumbledore felt that not even a Lemon Drop could calm him down. It was definite now; both Gringotts and Severus Snape have confirmed it. Hogwarts it- self was under danger; Harry and Tom could easily outwit the Ministry of Magic, and then gather enough Death Eaters or any kind of dark creatures they might want and attack the school.

But there was one thing that didn't add up, the Prophecy. It talked us if Tom and Harry were enemies rather than allies. Albus could only assume that they would eventually turn on each other, each hungry for even more power. The world would have to watch as the two most powerful people of their time battled out the out come. They would not do it quietly; instead large armies of people would be likely to die before the end.

Once again dark thought crept up into Dumbledore's mind. Maybe he should have taught Harry personally instead of leaving it to the other teachers. Maybe he shouldn't have avoided Harry's eyes for a year, maybe he should have taught him Occumancy himself. He should have, it was too late now.

Harry should have been told the truth years ago. He should have known the story, the full story, not the one written in every textbook for a dozen centuries. Maybe then the anger and the hatred growing inside him could have been prevented.

The Pensieve right in front of Dumbledore began to swirl, a memory surfaced. It was an angry boy shouting and kicking the furniture, his eyes shining lividly. Another memory stirred, it was almost an identical picture at first sight, but on the closer look differences could be found. The children's height was different; they wore different robes, the topic of frustration it-self varied greatly. But one thing was the same, the fire that burned in both Tom's and Harry's eyes were almost identical. Dumbledore shivered; was that where it all began?

Having thought about it though, he decided, it was definitely not the beginning. It could have well started when Tom started Hogwarts or when Tom's was born or when Dumbledore himself was born. Or you could say it was all coming from the times when Hogwarts was first built, or even perhaps in the times of the founders. Or maybe when the very first witch and wizard were born, although the exact knowledge of that date was long lost in the endless flow of time.

Albus didn't actually have an answer, as strange as that seemed. He fancied him-self a philosopher, but even the best philosophers didn't have all the answers to the universe. Gruffly he had to admit, Albus Dumbledore, one of the greatest Headmasters of Hogwarts was still perfectly human. That meant that like every other person he was prone to making mistakes. Lockhart was a perfect example, the fake Mad-Eye another, letting Cornelius Fudge become the Minister of Magic was one that caused particularly large amounts of stress and Pettigrew was a classic example as well. A more delicate one however was Tom Marvolo Riddle, even if most people were oblivious to Dumbledore ever having a hand in that matter. Harry Potter is the latest one that needed to be added to the already considerably long list.

There were the lies too of-course, for a man who hated any kind of lies whether intentional or not, he had told a multitude of them over the years. From the youngest of his students to the highest Ministry officials, all suffered from them at one time or other. Harry was the worst one though. Somehow Dumbledore was always over protective of the boy, perhaps because he knew Harry's parents and placed himself as Harry's informal guardian. Albus managed to shield Harry from the truth, preferring outright lies, half-lies and double meanings.

He had often said that there was nothing purely evil, that such a beast could never exist. Lies, and little else but that.

There was a creature like that, once very long time ago. In the present times it had vanished almost completely from history, as if erased on purpose. Occasionally rumours would arise, an old parchment would arise or an old diary or a not well-known document would be found. Or one of the most ancient paintings at Hogwarts would start talking at times. That was enough to provide certain knowledge of the subject and verify the facts. An unfortunate chapter in history, but true nevertheless.

'Albus?' Professor Flitwick finally asked, he had been sitting in the Headmaster's Office for at least an hour. Dumbledore however was deep in thought, his eyes losing the usual happy twinkle and his face turning grave. Flitwick usually preferred to let people to their own musings if they preferred to do so, but something told him Albus might be better off not thinking through every little thing in the world.

'Pardon me, ah, yes. Is there anything you wish to talk about?' Dumbledore asked springing back to the comfortable reality of his desk. He moved the Pensieve into its cupboard with a single wave of his hand, at Hogwarts the Headmaster almost supreme power, but sometimes he paid dearly for that privilege.

'Nothing of great importance.' Flitwick replied shaking his head as he observed his friend's behaviour.' You are too stressed these days.'

Albus did not respond, he was compelled that the Charms Professor actually heard of the term "Stress" let alone used it. It was a Muggle word so few Wizards ever came across it in their conversations. Flitwick especially was a surprise; after all he came from a long line of Muggle Haters.

'Albus, I know you have a lot on your mind, but don't lock yourself in here. The decorations are quite depressing as I am sure you found out decades ago.' Flitwick said sadly. It was true, to a certain point, a lot of people remarked over the centuries about it. Sometimes the Headmaster's Office seemed to loom over you, putting the whole weight of the heritage and traditions of the school on your shoulders

until you felt small and insignificant, another puppet in the hands of life. No one really knew what was the cause of the phenomenon, perhaps it was the castle reminding its inhabitants of what was expected from him or her or perhaps it was something entirely different.

'There are a lot of things that need to be done.' Dumbledore said 'The war, the real war is coming, it's right on our doorstep.'

'No reason to tire yourself out with worry and work.' Flitwick argued lightly. Sometimes the Headmaster would put up with an extraordinary amount of work just to help someone in need and forget about himself. Dumbledore was not getting any younger either, he was a hundred years or so (no one knew precisely and everyone was too embarrassed to ask), he needed to lie down for a little, take a holiday.' 'Lunch is about to start, come down to the Hall, it will be a good change for us all. It's always good to see the Head dine with the lower members of this establishment.'

'You know, you might not be tall but your heart means well. You should be proud of that.' Albus replied his eyes twinkling slightly. Flitwick relaxed, maybe the case wasn't as lost as it first seemed.

'I'll take that into account the next time someone asks me if my mother was a dwarf.' The Charms Professor said. In truth most people respected him and the abuse of his physical features gradually decreased over the decades. Albus chuckled; he took a moment to consider the idea to have lunch with his students. There was a time once when he ate every meal down in the Hall, that was of-course during the years when the Marauders were at large, so the food was often accompanied by entertainment chiefly provided by James and Sirius. These days he occasionally attended dinner, very rarely breakfast and almost never lunch. To Dumbledore it seemed the school's tradition of eating together had diminished in its grandeur and pleasure. Was the food worse? Hardly, the house-elves did what they have always done, their methods never changed. Perhaps the Marauders have left, that's why? There were plenty of people to replace them, in every house. Or was it Hogwarts itself?

He had to admit the current students at the school were not particularly great. The house rivalries seemed to be sharper then ever, the student numbers themselves were fewer, and there were no constant pranksters to lift everyone's moods. There was a strong Voldemort presence lurking around the shadows of people's minds. The Headmaster coming down to eat with the rest seemed like a good idea.

'Let's go then, I'd hate the food to go cold.' Albus stated scrunching up and throwing the latest letter from Fudge into the rubbish bin.

On the way down a few students looked strangely at the pair. Two bearded men walking side-by-side discussing the multiple uses of a particularly advanced charm that was discovered during the war with Grindelwald. Some other student were puzzled as to why the Headmaster was simply walking around the school, Dumbledore usually remained in his office or was away on other business. Most of the school had never even directly spoken to him in all their years at Hogwarts.

Strangely enough the conversation soon left the theme of Magic and turned to socks. Dumbledore blushed a little when Flitwick remarked that Albus nearly always wore mismatched ones.

'I always seem to lose the second ones of the pair; I have a feeling it might be a side effect from one of the jokes the Marauders played on me once. I used spend at least half an hour each morning trying to find a pair that matches, but to no avail. Not even tracing charms help so I gave up. I decided that no one would put that fact against me since everyone already knows of my passion fro Lemon Drops and Canary Creams.' Albus explained, he was greeted by several 'Good day's from the teachers and pupils. They assumed there was some kind of announcement that needed to be made if the Headmaster came down to the Hall.

The food it-self although not bad, was nothing special by Hogwarts standards; there were only a few courses available. Dumbledore noticed the dinnerware had a large collection of scratches on it; the plates were especially bad. Gold obviously never being the strongest of metals meant that all the dinnerware had to be changed once in a

while even if there were Anti-scratching spells placed on it. Dumbledore personally thought that such extravagancy was a waste. Couldn't they have just used silver or some plain metal like every other school? But traditions had to be abided and he didn't dare break it. After the meal the students and teachers rushed ff to their lessons Albus and Minerva were the only ones left at the table.

'Do you have a class?' Dumbledore asked.

Minerva shook her head 'Not for the rest of the afternoon. Care for walk?'

'Anything to avoid the stack of paperwork that is sitting on my desk.'  
Replied Professor Dumbledore.

Ron and Hermione were wandering the halls in the middle of another argument. They had just skipped lunch in favour of a long snogging session, so Ron was particularly hungry. As always the fight started with Ron accusing Hermione of a minor error and turned into violent Slytherin comparisons.

'You could hardly expect the boy to be unaffected by such a sudden death of a person so close to him.' Ron and Hermione heard not far in front of them. They could immediately tell it was Professor McGonagall who was speaking and the topic wasn't exactly a hard thing to figure out. Ron beckoned Hermione after him as he ran closer to the source of the sound.

'I believe he is getting a crash course in duelling, transfiguration, charms and several other subjects while he is there.' They heard Dumbledore state 'Most likely far more more advanced then what Hogwarts or even Auror training can provide.'

'If he comes back he will be a great asset in the war and if he doesn't, at least he is safe.' McGonagall remarked. Inwardly she didn't think Harry would return to the light side, but it felt better when she suggest his return out loud. 'You-know-who can't hurt him, that's a plus.'

'Tom Riddle or Voldemort, but not You-know-who.'

'Yes Albus, I know, fear of the name only increases the fear of the thing it-self.' Even without seeing the Transfiguration Professor inside their heads Ron and Hermione could vision McGonagall cringing as she said those words.

Hermione suddenly realize, the voices were coming closer, she grabbed Ron's sleeve and dragged him to the nearest empty classroom. The two Professors walked right past the door not noticing anything. Ron and Hermione were practically shaking in the corner of the classroom praying not to be spotted, they didn't move for several minutes afraid that the two Professors would come back the same way.

Eventually they calmed down, spying wasn't their favourite job, but it got them results. Hermione couldn't believe the teachers would be careless enough to talk about things like that in public places. There are bound to be spies at Hogwarts and if such information reached the wrong people the results could be fatal. Hermione collapsed on the closest chair while Ron climbed on one of the desks.

'Alright what can we make out from what we just overheard?' he asked, no matter his feelings inside he wanted to stay calm. He wasn't a child anymore he ought to stop acting like one. Hermione frowned, there was little information to analyse, and they only heard a few lines of what most likely would have been a long conversation.

'One I don't think he is in trouble and he is probably safe from Death Eaters. Two, Harry is most likely in some training facility and he might come back eventually.' Hermione said quietly. She hoped her guessed were right, they only heard part of the conversation the meaning might have been entirely different. Ron nodded wondering again why Hermione wasn't sorted into Ravenclaw 'Lets keep this between us, they haven't told us so I doubt it's a good idea for the whole school to know.'

Lord Arhimar was standing in front of a mirror checking out his new robes. His hand brushed against the crisp material which seemed to emit it's own eerie light. The robes themselves were somewhat different from his school robes that he used to wear. They were longer so his shoes could be hidden making him look like he floated

around rather than walked. At the back the hood was much bigger than usual, to cast shadows around the wearer's face hiding his or her identity. Unlike the other Death Eaters he didn't wear a mask, he didn't care if everyone knew his allegiance. But while fiddling with his wand, alone doubts began to once again creep out. The two voices that inhabited his head as long as he could remember seemed to be in quarrel as always.

'Lord Arhimar?' asked Wormtail trembling like a leaf on a windy day  
'All is ready.'

Harry stuffed the wand back in its holder and suddenly remembering the second one scrambled the room searching for it. Finding it he concealed it up his sleeve and followed Pettigrew down to where Voldemort and the other Death Eaters stood. Lord Arhimar noted Snape was missing, obviously he was not informed of the plans about the Minister's death.

On Voldemort's command the Disapparation wards were lifted and the Death Eaters apparated to the street where Fudge's House stood.

Arhimar grabbed a handful of Floo powder, He really didn't feel up to the job, maybe someone else should do it. No, how is he going to call them back? The plan was already in motion, besides he had to win the respect of the Death Eaters. This was something he had to do. Just think it's just another Quidditch Match. He threw the powder into the fire and said the address as clearly as he could manage.

He ignored the unpleasant sensation he got every time he travelled by Floo Powder, he felt like he was being flushed down the drain. Not stopping to admire the dark house Arhimar scumbled around until he found the stairs to the ground floor. Voldemort's information source said there were five body guards in the house at any given time, but they weren't trained Aurors. Harry hoped they wouldn't be much of a challenge.

He crept around the house, finding the guards he had to struggle with him-self just not to laugh. Four of the guards had too much Fire Whisky or some beverage of that kind and were now asleep on the floor, the fifth although he probably tried to keep watch fell asleep.



Harry wasted no time, he stunned them just in case and left to lie in the centre of the floor.

Then he opened the doors and windows into the house. He had to admit the defences were not anything special, there were based on one point: the only way a person could get in is if someone let them in from the inside. The fact that someone could use the fireplace was forgotten, as always the Ministry overlooked the most obvious things.

The Death Eaters rushed inside not caring if they woke up the whole neighbourhood or not. The way they saw it, the more havoc the better. Arhimar didn't need to do much more; the Death Eaters were more than capable of handling the rest. Within two minutes the whole Fudge Family were huddled together with the Death Eaters standing in a circle around them.

They started with the women, Cornelius' wife and daughter; they took turns until Crabbe decided that the Minister looked gay to him. Harry stood by the side, not joining in but having fun still. He decided the good side was over-rated, hearing people cry was so much more pleasing than knowing you stunned some nameless Death Eater.

Voldemort himself had long ago found he didn't enjoy raping people so he didn't join in, he looked at the two kids. Their faces were blank, the older one couldn't have been more than four, the younger looked about two. Voldemort picked them up and carried them off to the kitchen. He didn't really care what happened to them, but he knew well enough their end would not be pretty if the Death Eaters found them.

Taking out his wand he muttered 'Avada kedavra.' A quick death was probably the best thing; Tom knew what it felt like to be an orphan. A single tear rolled down his cheek as the two little bodies hit the tiled floor. They didn't quite make the usual thud an adult would make; instead it was only a soft thud. Was all that death really worth it? They were purebloods from a respected family that had no love for Muggles. Really Tom had no problem with them, he liked children in general, they just happened to get in the way.

Tom saw the children's mother and grandmother were lying on the floor blood seeping slowly out of their chests. Cornelius' son in law was also dead; Voldemort didn't pause to learn how. The elderly Minister of magic was making himself look more of a fool than usual by openly crying. Bellatrix grabbed the bodies of the two kids by their hair and dragged them for their grandfather to see.

'You see what happens when you don't consider the Dark Lord important enough to even mention him. You were useful for a while, but not anymore.' Lucius said taunting the prisoner. Fudge didn't reply, he numbly stared at the bodies of his family not accepting what was around him.

The Death Eaters had decided what to do with the person who they hoped would be the last Minister of Magic in Britain. They set a slow burning spell on the Minister and the house then hurried out into the street. Before their eyes a large ball of fire erupted from inside the mansion. Lord Arhimar realised with some satisfaction, the five guards would burn inside with the remains of Fudge's family. The Cries of the Minister could be heard kilometres away as the fire gradually consumed him and everything he ever stood for.

'There is one more thing we need to do.' Voldemort whispered in Arhimar's ear, he nodded a little nervously. The spell had worked during their trials, but they have never done it completely. Their voices drowning out even the creaking of the fire, together they shouted

'Fulmordeo!'

Immediately bright wisps of smoke started coming out of the two wands, it formed into a figure, it looked very similar to the dark mark, but more frightening. Even the Death Eaters stood in awe. Slowly the Death Eaters left leaving only Harry and Tom standing in front of the burning house. The fire wouldn't stop burning for at least two months and the menacing figure above would not disappear until the fire died out. The Magical World would know who was responsible.

Harry took out something out of his pocket and placed it right in the middle of the path leading to the no longer existing front door.

## Chapter Eleven- Of Letters and Forests

The grey clouds hid any trace of the moon and through a few, small gaps revealed only a handful of stars. The street however was far from dark, one of the houses was on fire and above it shone a bright figure. A face, a scull rather composed of thousands of red and silver flames hung in the sky. On the forehead of the scull was a glittering lightning bolt, the brightest part of the whole figure. The onlookers stood open mouthed as the forked, snake-like tongue hissed something and the figure burst, sparks flying off in all directions.

'What was that?' someone asked at last.

There was a long pause 'The new Dark Mark.' Came an eventual reply.

Of the twenty or so people standing around street only one or two didn't react. Minerva McGonagall noticed something lying on the ground, only centimetres out of reach to the flames of the still burning house. She picked it up trying to touch as little of the surface as possible. With her experiences in the Magical World she knew perfectly well that such strange findings could have dire consequences. There were only two envelopes, she looked at the seal and frowned.

'Is there anything we can do about the fire?' asked Mad-Eye Moody his zooming in and out of it's normal socket.

Tonks shook her head 'No, it's been charmed to keep on burning, we can't reverse the spell.'

'Lets leave then; there is no point in staying. By the time the fire finishes with them not even their bones will remain.' Mad-Eye said his eyes now fixed on the flamed erupting from the roof.

McGonagall flinched 'That's cruel, Moody.'

'It's the truth.' Mad-Eye replied gruffly 'I think it's time for an emergency Order meeting.'

'Alright.' Tonk agreed. She shouted a few orders to the Ministry Aurors who were called just in case a few of the Death Eaters still remained. They left without uttering a word. The Order members quickly apparated to the Headquarters. McGonagall sighed looking around the empty living room. She had to wonder when the rest of the Order would arrive, it was late at night; many would have already went to bed.

She thought she heard someone coming through the door, turning around she saw Arthur Weasley standing in the doorway with strange tension on his face. He continued standing completely still until some more of the Order arrived. Contradictory to Minerva's worries soon most of the Order was standing around her looking wide-awake. She beckoned them into the Seminar Room.

'You wouldn't have anything to eat? I desperately need a snack.' asked Mundugrus.

McGonagall rolled her eyes, couldn't that man ever concentrate on the subject? 'I am sorry, no refreshments today. We have important things to discuss, urgently.'

Everyone hushed as Dumbledore shuffled in and took his seat up in the front of the room. For such an old man he had an incredible presence, it was remarkable. Whenever he was in the room no one could escape his web of power. Only a few people in history had ever been regarded with the same respect as Dumbledore was.

'No doubt many of you had already heard of the matter we are about to discuss.' Dumbledore said 'For those who haven't, the Minister and his family were killed last night.'

'By You-know-who I presume?' asked Mrs. Weasley

'Not without the help of Harry Potter, the sign above the door made that clear.' Minerva replied heavily.

' Why won't we warned of this attack, Severus?' asked Mad-Eye Moody.

Even years after Snape had officially turned spy the old Auror didn't trust him. Of-course Moody never trusted anyone, but Mad-Eye was always nearly positive Snape was still loyal to You-know-who. The attack proved everything, not even Dumbledore would be able to defend Snape after this.

'I didn't know, I swear.' Snape stuttered. How could he just let something like that slip? Unless the attack was arranged without Severus' knowing. Harry whispered something to Voldemort, the meeting finished so quickly after that. Surely the whole evening wasn't just for Harry to show off. Could the Dark Lord exclude a person when he was calling the Death Eaters to him? Only Voldemort knew the full capabilities of the Dark Mark.

'Well, Severus? We are all waiting, what do you have to say?' Arthur asked, the greasy haired Professor was never his favourite person. Snape looked at the Order, he had trouble believing that they had turned on him so quickly. Even after the years of loyal work that he had put in.

'The Dark Lord knows I am a spy.' Snape stated grimly.

Dumbledore glanced at him 'Are you sure? We don't want to loose our only link into Voldemort's circle.'

Snape shook his head. 'That's the only explanation, Potter told him. I am sorry, I can't go back to the Dark Lord.'

'You have to, we need the information.' Dung said.

'You don't understand, Mundugrus. If I go to another one of those meetings you are going to be picking up of me around the whole of Britain.' Replied Snape. A few people managed to smile in compassion, but most simply looked sick at the idea.

'Sometimes we just have to sacrifice for what is right.' Mad-Eye said his magical eye spun in its socket with an incredible speed making a funny, cracking noise.

'Not a life, Moody, human life are what we are trying to save if you remember.' argued Tonks. She always had great respect for the old Mad-Eye, but sometimes he could just forget that there were real people involved. The 'Constant Vigilance' motto only went so far.

'We need the information and Severus is the only way we can get it.' Mad-Eye retorted loudly.

'All right, Alastor, I understand what you are saying.' Snape agreed although he was deeply uncomfortable with the decision.

'No! If You-know-who knows you are a spy he is not going to give you any information.' said Mrs. Weasley.

'The Dark Lord is not perfect, he can easily let something slip.' Snape argued. He had already made up his mind and he wasn't going to let anyone convince him to change his decision.

Wishing the argument would stop Minerva chose to ignore the whole thing. Her tired gaze fell on the two envelopes that she was still holding. She decided that if something happened to her someone would be able to reverse the effects. She opened the slightly thicker one as it had no address on it.

"Professor?" Dumbledore asked softly.

Minerva paled 'The letter, it's from Harry.'

The room fell silent, the flapping of the curtains were the only noise that broke the hush. McGonagall handed the letter over to Dumbledore. The Headmaster cleared his throat and started reading.

'To the Order of the Phoenix,

This is your last warning there will be no more. If any of you fools dare to try to oppose Lord Voldemort, or me; you and all your family will meet their ends very soon. With Fudge we have shown you only a taste of what is about to happen, you have yet to see our full power.

The war has begun; you had better be prepared, because we'll show no mercy. So far, the score is one to nil; you are losing. Last night we have broken one of the two pillars that have supported the magical world for so long. It is not long until the other will fall; beware Dumbledore; beware, your end is coming. Perhaps you should give up now, we all know the outcome of this game already. Don't of this war as an invasion; it is merely a return of something that is ours by right.

Yes, you all know what I am talking about, don't deny it. The Ministry will crumble upon it's own misery; all we had to do was to push it in the right direction. Hogwarts is not far from it's end either, it's corrupt on it's own power and tradition. That shall be its curse.

But don't you worry; you won't see what will happen to your country. You shall be fed to the dogs long before that. I can see the fear in your eyes, death is creeping up on you, and you can smell it already.

Until we meet again,

Lord Arhimar.

'Is he insane or does he really mean that?' someone asked 'Either way I don't like it.'

Dumbledore put the letter down on the table and took off his glasses. Without them the wrinkles around his eyes were more obvious he looked at least half a century older than usual.

'There is a second one, it's addressed to Ron and Hermione.' Minerva stated grimly.

'Don't give it to them!' shrieked Mrs, Weasley.

'They deserve to know, let them read it.' Minerva disagreed. Ron and Hermione were what, fifteen, sixteen? Surely they were capable of handling of reading a letter.

'They might tell someone, then the whole wide world will know. It was a hard enough task to keep the news out of every newspaper in the country.' Fletcher said.

'They have more than enough practise keeping Harry's secrets as it is, they can be trusted with something like this.' Arthur replied.

'Look Arthur, Molly, you decide. You are Ron's parents you should have the choice.' Snape suggested finally.

'And what about Hermione? Should we call in her parents too and let them decide?' McGonagall argued 'Lets just vote for it.'

The Order raised their hands if they were for it. Dumbledore was the last; his hand was for a long time somewhere in the middle, in a limbo. From the top of the table he could easily see that the votes were divided exactly in half. His vote would make the final decision. He really didn't want to lie, but he didn't think that Ron and Hermione should be faced with the problem either. In fact he desperately wanted to know what was inside the letter. Perhaps he should read it first, but he had no right to do so. Finally he raised his hand, slowly but steadily. The letter was for them; they should have a read of it. No more lies either, he wouldn't be able to live with himself otherwise.

Minerva travelled to Hogwarts to wake the two Gryffindors up and bring them to Grimmauld Place. The rest of the Order meanwhile discussed the newest Quidditch season. In ten minutes the two teenagers were standing looking extremely sleepy and wearing only their nightgowns.

'The Order thought you should read this. You can do to the kitchen and read it there if you wish to.' Dumbledore said handing over the letter. Ron accepted it meekly and grabbing Hermione's hand disappeared into the other room.

Dear Ron and Hermione,

I hope this letter reaches you in its original state and the Order of the Phoenix had the decency to keep our privacy.



No doubt you are deeply worried about me, the first thing I have to tell you, what happened has nothing to do with you. I left simply because I had to. I am safe; I am probably in the safest in the whole planet, particularly from the Dark Lord. My new home is comfortable, it's big and I am well cared for. Also as Hermione would probably want to know, yes I am still studying. Actually I am studying harder than I have ever done in my life, even compared to the stuff we did during the Triwizard Challenge. My lessons are harder than anything that we were taught at Hogwarts, but I have a great teacher who makes it a lot easier for me.

I am sorry I can't write more, but I doubt even this much will be approved.

Lord Gryffindor.

'It's great to hear something from him, it's been a while now.' Hermione said; she finally felt awake. As a rule she thought that undisturbed sleep for the whole night was important, but on this occasion she decided it was all right to have a change in her usual routine.

'Yes, except he didn't actually tell us a lot of facts.' Ron replied

'Maybe he is sworn to secrecy or something of that kind. We should be glad we have this much.' Hermione remarked fiddling with the envelope. It was made out of thick parchment, not any that she had ever seen sold in shops whether magical or not. But a lot of richer people had their parchment especially made to suit their requirements; Hogwarts in fact ordered their parchment from a small, magical shop somewhere in Rome.

'Sometimes I really don't understand Harry, superior knowledge of magic in exchange for leaving friends and family. I would have stayed in Hogwarts for sure.' Frowned Ron.

'You and Harry are two very different people; you don't think the same. Besides by the way the letter is worded, I don't think Harry had any choice or at least assumed he did.' Hermione said looking at the letter once more in search of new clues.

Ron made a strange face 'You don't think Dumbledore put him up to this, do you?'

'No, remember Dumbledore's reaction after Harry left? He was far from happy.'" Hermione shook her head

'Yeah, it's got to be Harry's decision then, at least it proves our theory true.'

Hermione tensed up 'Should we tell people about this?'

'I don't know, it's addressed to just the two of us, but he didn't mention anything about us keeping the letter quiet and I am tired of telling everyone that I don't know what happened. But the Order seems to want to quiet, otherwise they would have told us already.' Ron said thoughtfully

'Well let's say that we have a letter from him, but we can't tell what's inside.' Hermione replied trying to find the ultimatum. 'Ah, I am so tired of being constantly asked about it, they have no compassion what so ever.'

'Well are going to knock or not?' Ron asked hurriedly.

Hermione turned to look at him 'What are we going to say to him?'

'I don't know, how his trip was or something.'" He replied

Hagrid had only came back from his most recent Order mission. There were no announcements to make the day special. He simply turned up at breakfast, a bit tired looking but not scarred and bloody like with his last trip. It was a weekend and Ron managed to convince Hermione to forget about homework and revision for a few hours so they could go and visit Hagrid.

Fang barked inside, the front door swung open revealing the half giant standing behind it.

'Ron, Hermione nice ter see yeh!' he smiled giving the pair a bear hug and nearly making them topple over themselves.

'How are you doing, Hagrid? Is Grawp all right?' Hermione asked sitting down on the over large bed.

'Been well, doin' some travelin' as yeh know.' Hagrid replied, he poured water into the tea kettle and placed it over the fire to heat.' Shouldn't be talking; to yeh, but yeh already too deep. I've been requitin' fer the war, giants and such.'

'Any luck?' asked Ron.

'Nuh, too scared, just like the first time only worse an' the Forest hasn' been quiet.' Hagrid sighed.

Hagrid just couldn't understand the actions of the centaurs, why did they decide to abandon the school precisely at this time. After all they had great respect for Dumbledore. Had they seen something in the stars? Surely Firenze wasn't the only reason He was deeply worried now that the centaurs were in quarrel with Dumbledore; the only real allies were the spiders. There was of-course and occasional creature that decided to help, but most said they didn't want to do anything with both You-know-who and Hogwarts.

'How is Grawp?' inquired Hermione.

"He's not bad, 'is English is better, but he's lonely, maybe I should get him a mate. Hagrid said slowly 'but 'is luck with the ladies, I dunno, later maybe.'

'Has he been causing more havoc in the Forest lately?' asked Hermione only mildly interested. Behaviour patterns of giants were not the most fascinating things in the world, to her anyway.

'Nuh, after the centaur thin' he's been quieter.'

'Well that's good we don't' want to draw attention to himself any more then we have to. No doubt the Ministry won't be happy if they found a giant roaming around the Forest.' Ron smiled sadly

'About the ministry, have you heard the news yet? It's been all over the High Flyer, but you probably didn't have time to read it.' Hermione asked half trailing off.

'I hear' alright, Dumbledore told me.' Hagrid shrugged taking the over boiling pot from the fire 'Tea?'

'No thank-you.' Ron scowled lightly 'Who do you think will be the next Minister of Magic?'

Ministers were usually elected on twelve-year terms and the decision was very important to the British Magical World. Already there were many rumours as to who the nominees would be. Ron was just happy Lucius Malfoy was out of the running; no matter how many bribes he would pay he reputation was forever damaged after his little visit to Azkaban. Otherwise the Gryffindors would have had to endure Malfoy strolling around the grounds invincible to any punishment, his head swelling even bigger then it already was.

No doubt Dumbledore would be offered the job, purely out of general courtesy. Not one witch or wizard could dream of Dumbledore abandoning his job at Hogwarts. Dumbledore himself had long said that even upon his deathbed he would still be signing the paperwork for the school.

But maybe it was a wiser decision to reject the Ministry job. No matter what precautions Fudge took, You-know-who still got him in the end and (if the newspapers were true) disposed of the Minister in the most unpleasant way. However another factor had to be considered, the Ministry elections took their time. The longest for five years, the shortest was eleven months. With the current situation no one could expect such a speedy decision. Maybe by the time the final decision would have to be made, Hermione and Ron would be old enough to vote themselves.

Ron occasionally fancied himself with the fantasy of his father being chosen for the job, but didn't trust himself to even suggest anything of that kind. His father worked in the smallest department in the Ministry, he wasn't anywhere near the top and he wasn't rich enough to afford

the numerous bribes that would be needed. After all the 'Magical Times' has been voting the British Ministry as the most corrupt establishment in the world for over a hundred years.

And while the community bickered between themselves deciding their future, the Ministry it-self would be in turmoil. In truth, no matter how misery the Minister of Magic was, he still did his job in managing the Ministry. Without him the multiple departments would fall apart trying to get on top of each other. The perfect opportunity for Voldemort to attack.

'Ron? Are you all right?' asked Hermione staring deeply into her boyfriend's eyes.

Ron lifted his head 'What?'

'You've been sitting here for the last ten minutes ignoring Hagrid and I.' Hermione giggled softly

## Chapter Twelve- Of Stories and Doubts

Lord Arhimar was looking through the titles of the books on the shelves. The books that were in his room were nothing compared to the Slytherin Library. It was a large room, twice the size of the Great Hall at Hogwarts, completely lined with rows upon rows of shelves. There were books on every subject, starting with the standard schoolbooks ending with various journals and diaries of the most famous witches and wizards in history. The library even contained every edition of *Hogwarts: A History* ever published.

Also the Arhimar's confusion, there were hundreds of Muggle books, some fiction, some non-fiction, some romance, there were even a few picture books stashed neatly on the bottom shelf. Riddle explained that there were chosen by certain criteria sent to every publisher, whenever a new book would come out that fit the list it would be sent to the house and the money would be taken from one of the vaults in Gringotts. The previous owners had of-course added their favourites to the collection. Tom's grandfather for example was a great lover of hunting; there were several books on the subject in the library still kept from his time.

At the moment however Arhimar was looking for anything that contained a map of Hogwarts' countryside. The Marauders' Map failed to show the land in detail so he was now stuck looking through about five thousand books that had references to Hogwarts. He grabbed a few off the shelves and began leafing through them one by one.

"Look Tom, if you would just help me, we could do this in half the time.' Arhimar muttered.

The older man was sitting on one of the chairs drinking the red wine that a house-elf brought for him a few minutes ago. As far as he was concerned, one glass a day wasn't a crime; he wasn't like some of his servants who drank until they passed out. Voldemort looked over at Harry and grumblingly decided to help. Leaving Arhimar on the floor to continue flipping pages Voldemort went straight to the source.

'Here you go, exactly what we need.' He said holding up a book entitled 'Maps of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardly and its surroundings'. 'Date, 1986, perfectly usable.'

Harry snarled snatching the book out of Tom's hands ' I really hate you at times like these.'

'That is of no concern to me.' Voldemort replied easily 'Sit down, lets talk.'

'About what?'

'About securing our alliance the Magical way.' Tom replied, he lifted a small, but lavishly decorated knife out of his pocket. The blade was made out of a mixture of materials making it seem to glow from the inside. Several jewels, ranging colour were set in the hilt with small spidery runes bordering the stones. Harry gulped, he had heard of that ritual before.

'Harry, have you had any nightmares?' Tom asked offhandedly, perhaps to lessen the tension in the room.

'No' Arhimar replied somewhat puzzled. 'No nightmares, no dreams, nothing.'

'Good, lets begin.' Ton stated firmly. He closed is eyes and muttered a long string of words barely audible to even Harry. He kept repeating the line until Arhimar joined in; they switched from Latin to Anglo-Saxon breaking into a wild chant. The two voices eventually merged together unrecognisable from one other. The room darkened, a sudden wisp of wind swept through the room knocking over Tom's wineglass and ripping a few books.

'Frater.' Voldemort shouted switching back to Latin, he raised the knife in his right hand on cut across the palm of his left. Not crying out he handed the weapon over to Arhimar who repeated the process. Both of them looked at one other for a second before putting their bleeding hands together and letting the blood flow freely into the other's wound.

The room returned to normal, Harry and Tom broke apart and collapsed on the floor. Their hands were covered in blood; the cuts were shallow, but bled profoundly nevertheless. Lord Arhimar watched silently as the wound healed it-self leaving only a small scar.

'We are blood brothers now.' Tom stated, he seemed out of breath and his voice was hoarse. 'I trust you know the consequences of this ritual.'

Arhimar avoided his gaze 'It's magic, the kind you don't use unless you have no other choice. We are closer then family now, we survive of each other's life forces. If I am hurt I can borrow your energy, and backwards. We cannot die separately; they'll have to kill both of us.

'And if we are to betray one other, both will die.' Arhimar smiled darkly; at least the prophecy can no longer have an effect. If Harry were to attempt to kill Voldemort, he would take the boy to the grave with him.

'I don't understand, this ritual was meant to be much longer, something about creating a mind link between the two participants.' Arhimar shook his head struggling to remember.

'Most of the work was done already, if you recount the spell I used in my first attempt the get rid of you, you could see and feel me sometimes. I consider that I mind link.' Voldemort explained.

'Oh' Arhimar sighed 'Say, this library must have a copy of Salazar's diaries or something stashed away somewhere.'

'Of-course not, Salazar was nearly illiterate. Yet the truth is never written fully in any one book, you can see snippets of it in some texts, but it would take a lifetime to piece them together.' Riddle said.

Arhimar's face changed to a quirk-some expression 'Are you trying to tell me you know the whole story?'

'Perhaps I do, I can tell you as much as I know, and it's for you to decide what you believe and what you don't.'



'Fine, old man, tell me your little bedside story.' Harry said making himself comfortable on a sofa.

'First thing to say, Hogwarts is older than a thousand years, in reality it's a lot closer to twelve hundred, obviously precise dates have been long lost. People have first started rounding the number off to a thousand three centuries ago and they are still doing it now. But I think the story begins before the founding of the school.'

'King Arthur.' Harry said.

'Don't interrupt me. Now you have no doubt heard about Arthur before. Contrarily to belief he was far from the ruler of all Britain, he was a lord of a small province in Northern Wales, his descendants also governed there for several generations.

Now Godric was the second son of the last King, his childhood playmate was Salazar; the two were closer than twins almost as if one person was split into two bodies. They knew one other's thoughts; they slept in rooms that were adjacent to each other. They were raised as Muggles, it was Salazar's father who taught them the art of wizardry. In these days such notions as purebreds or Muggles were not existent, they lived together, there was no other way.

As for Helga and Rowena, they were ladies at the court, roughly the same age as Godric and Salazar. Helga always loved plants, so when she realised she had powers she was fascinated by the art of Herbology. Rowena was a powerful seer and truth sayer. Some legends say that Godric was in love with her, but I think his love for his own wife was far greater.

I suppose the most obvious truth about Godric was that he was not the son his father expected; he didn't have the personality to be the king. Luckily for Godric his older brother was all that was needed. Godric realized from an early age his fate lay in magic and his knowledge of it.

At that point in time Britain was at war, sure skirmishes between the different lords and kings were perfectly normal, but this war was different. A band of wizards and witches mastered an army with the

goal to takeover the island. They wanted those granted magic to rule and nearly succeeded. Godric's home was one of the few free towns that were left; the rest fell to the conquerors. Eventually the war came to their doorstep; Godric's father and brother were lost in battle. He was the only one in the family who could rightfully take the throne and he refused it.

It wasn't as if he just fled; he made an agreement. His people would be treated kindly, he would keep his title as Lord as so would his friends, he would be paid moulds of gold in return and he would be left alone to do what he liked. The enemy couldn't refuse, but at the very end he made one last point, should the enemy ever be leaderless and defeated in battle his descendant could step in and take the throne and claim himself the King of all Britain or appoint another in his place. Rowena was the one responsible for putting forth the idea; Godric only followed her orders. The opposition laughed, they were never defeated in battle and Godric's plea although remembered, was never taken seriously.

Soon enough the whole of Britain was consumed, instead for fighting over the top leadership, the enemy made a wise decision and formed a council. They made the magical folks live separately from the rest, but their control of Muggles slipped. This council would after a time become the Ministry of Magic as it is today.

Godric however was not in the best of spirits, he was not sure of his decision; guilt nearly consumed him. But his three friends stood by him and persuaded him to leave his hometown and journey up into the isolated mountains of Scotland where it was rumoured all magic was born. Rowena had a vision of a great castle buzzing with magical energy and their names sung in songs, centuries into the future.

She asked others to help; workers of all kinds were brought in. They worked together with Godric and Salazar they built the foundations. Years went the castle was made to the best defences architecturally and magically. There were hundreds of tapestries, thousands of paintings. Nothing in Britain could compare to it, it took two decades to complete. It was only a few days after that Helga planted seeds for what she hoped would one day be a flourishing forest just outside of

the school. The name it-self came from a joke of one of the early students of the school, his name long forgotten.

More students came with every year each adding to what later would become the greatest traditions of the school. One troublemaker created a song that is sang to this day as the school song. Those who left the school were always set against the Ministry.

Happiness, as it is, never lasts. The school, the only one of the kind at the time in the world could hardly go unnoticed and its heads were already well known. The Council willing to solve every problem with magic strove to find a spell to bring the four to their side. They meddled into Dark Arts and found a ritual to use. But something in the process went wrong, the magic turned on them, the consequences changed history.

The spell affected only one of the founders. It was unclear why, perhaps because Salazar was the most powerful of the four or because he was the Headmaster. There was a creature unleashed, a creature that consumed the mind. At first changes were slight; he began to teach his students differently, he talked of new ideas. Then he wanted to be the greatest, his eyes glittered with ambition. When the others refused to aid him, he left the school. That was the time when the Chamber of Secrets legends began to creep out.

Helga and Rowena thought it was only a casual thing, although they were disgusted at Salazar teaching his students to hate all humans with no magic and set them against one other. Godric was more concerned for his friend. For the first time in his life he didn't understand Salazar's actions. He grew afraid at Salazar's leaving.

News soon started arriving of a Dark Lord coming to power. He wished to crush all people under his iron fist; he wanted to exterminate all Muggles. For the first time the word –Muggle arose. Those without magic were frowned upon; a wizard found near one was considered a traitor. The purebloods began to take control. This was what the council wanted except it was taken to such extremes they themselves began to oppose it.

Godric had long guessed what happened, he followed the traces of this Dark Lord. When the confrontation came Godric saw not the face of his dearest friend, but a twisted, mad thing that took over. They battled long, with swords, with axes, with wands, but they were tied. They shook hills, they made rivers and lakes spill; for the first time a true evil roamed the earth. At last Godric understood the truth, Salazar was trapped in his own body, possessed by a demon of hell it-self, a demon that would not let go until death.

It grew dark, Godric's hope faded as the sun set over the horizon, he could barely lift his sword, his body was bruised, there was a deep wound in his chest. With what remained of his strength he did what no wizard dared before, he entered hell it-self. He spoke to the fiends of darkness as they attacked him, as hungry wolves on a winter night. He drew the power of his ancestors, calling upon them for protection. It all came to an end with another agreement, this time with the demon it-self.

Salazar would be spared of the curse, instead a descendant of Gryffindor and Slytherin who claimed their titles would be taken in place. Godric thought no one would ever want his name. Salazar was released, but he was never the same again. If not for the help of Helga the pair would not have lived for long. Salazar and Godric returned to Hogwarts attempting to put things right, but the teachings of Salazar in his insanity were engraved too deep in the minds in students. The purity of Hogwarts was lost forever.

But time went on; Godric took over the job of Headmaster, the forest grew. The Ministry abandoned its control over Muggles and allied it-self with Hogwarts. It is said that Rowena had only one true vision after Salazar's return, she said not what she saw, but whispered one line.

'If someone promises, someone else pays.'

Harry held his breath; his gaze lost somewhere he couldn't comprehend. Voldemort said nothing, for the first time he felt something stirring in his mind, a memory perhaps triggered by the tale. Arhimar broke the silence:

'Do you think it's true?'

'I don't know, it's a legend it must be based on some facts at least. It's a dark story, not for children. Most won't believe it, but they didn't believe in the Chamber of Secrets either, though, we both know how true that story is.' Riddle reasoned thoughtfully.

'A rather gloomy prediction for us then.' Arhimar said.

Riddle shrugged 'It says descendants of Gryffindor and Slytherin, it doesn't necessary have to be us; besides Hell? I think that was highly exaggerated. How do you get to hell? More importantly, how do you make a deal with a demon without it eating you first?'

Arhimar didn't respond, a small voice in his head (the one that sounded annoyingly Gryffindish) was telling him that the whole thing, Hell and demons included, was true.

'Why are you doing this Harry?' asked a soft, gentle female voice originating at one of the windows not far from where Arhimar sat.

'Don't call me that' he ordered, the book was surprisingly interesting and he didn't want to be interrupted. 'Who are you anyway?' He asked about to return to " Why Dark Lords Fall"

'Your worst nightmare" the girl laughed sarcastically.

He could not help but look up, his eyes widened and changed colour. He felt several large butterflies leap around the inside of his stomach. The girl was sitting on the windowsill her legs out stretched. She wore Muggle clothes, dark, worn jeans and a white shirt. From what Harry could tell she was quite tall, most likely to be around his own height, her light hair was let loose to drop on her shoulders, it shimmered slightly in the sunlight. Her oval, pale looking face was fixed on the boy. Harry stared at her grey-blue eyes.

'Don't look so scared, I wasn't serious' she laughed once more. Darn she thought He is so much cuter then I imagined

'Who are you?' he managed to mutter at last 'You look familiar.'

'Really?' she inquired.' I assure you, we haven't met before.'

'What are you doing here? He asked attempting to appear commanding but very much failing largely due to the fact he was still staring at the female in front of him.

"Can't you guess?" she replied jumping of the windowsill "I came to see you of-course, you are the new Dark Lord and the Boy-who-lived, a big celebrity. Since we are alone, can you give me your autograph?" She smirked reaching to brush her hair out of the way.

'You are a Death Eater.' Harry said.

Her face suddenly fell and she became grim 'No, I am not. I will be shortly. But why does it matter? You are surrounded by Death Eaters. Just so you know, I will not be a mere servant of Voldemort, or you for that matter. I am very much my own person"

Harry stumbled 'I am sorry; I keep staring at you. But you don't see many people as pretty as you around here. It's mostly Death Eaters.'

'Understandable and maybe a little too close sounding to the usual speeches of flirting' she replied, chucking as if a sudden idea came into her mind 'You have gorgeous eyes you know, has anyone ever told you that? Very warm, highly unlike the slime green of the Slytherins.'

'Tha-ank you, it has been said, but never compared to the Slytherin House colours, I have to admit.' Harry replied back as graciously as possible

'My pleasure. Now tell me, what are you doing here?' she asked.

'I suppose to become what my destiny wants me to be.' Harry replied slowly, the situation suddenly seemed like a major exam at school and he was stuck on a question he knew would cause him to fail if he got it wrong.

'You believe in destiny then?' the girl said a little surprised, it was not an answer she expected 'What does it tell you to do?'

'To claim my title of Lord Gryffindor.' Harry replied shakily, the girl was very unnerving now and the butterflies inside him refused to settle down.

'If you are Lord Gryffindor then your place is at Hogwarts or ruling Britain, but not in the house of a murderer of your parents.' she stated calmly 'Think about that for a while. I better go.'

'But I still don't know who you are.' Harry asked stubbornly

'I know who and what I am, that's all that matters' she put a finger to his lips as Harry started to complain 'Shh. my lord, let me keep my name for now. I need to ask you for a small favour'

Harry nodded in amazement as she let go 'Anything for you. How about I call you No-name for a while?'

'I like that name' she whispered and reached in softly linking Harry's lips to her own. She let go quickly and said sweetly winking 'Keep your meeting to yourself and you might find out my name someday.'

She hurried off leaving Harry standing in the middle of the corridor completely with his mouth hanging open as he exploded with happiness.

Lord Voldemort watched the Death Eaters filling in, beside him his young ally was yawning un-ceremonially. There were about two-dozen people in the room, all of them from old pureblood families. They were the new generation; half of them were still in Hogwarts. Their mothers and fathers had served Voldemort, tonight would be the greatest honour for these adolescents.

The older Death Eaters stood around the sides, their masks on, and their robes freshly cleaned. The youngsters were forced to stand in the middle, clinging together like a flock of scared sheep. They were wearing their normal clothes, not one of them dared to turn up in jeans or a shirt; they all wore some kinds of robes. The Death Eater

robes don't deserve to be worn on anyone who is not a Death Eater hence would only be given out after the ceremony

'Shall we begin?' Lord Arhimar said not turning away from the faces of the teenagers. He recognised some of them from Hogwarts, mostly boys from Slytherin although he thought he saw a Ravenclaw hiding at the back and a couple of girls were grouped together towards the side. Voldemort rose from his seat, all fiddling and whispering stopped in a second.

'Tonight is the night and take pride in what we achieved. These who stand before us are the product of long years of hard labour. Their parents now stand in this very room. Tonight is the night that we shall see who is worthy to join this elite.'

One of the girls snorted very lightly during the mention of parents, Arhimar thought this was the girl he talked to before. But he put her out of his mind as he began to speak:

'To become a Death Eater you must first feel what your victim will feel, you must know how to cast the spell feeling no shame in it. First the other Death Eaters will cast the Crataous upon you, then you must perform the spell on one other. Remember, you cannot scream.'

Voldemort watched the teenagers as they turned to each other absolutely horrified. Without commands sorted the wannabies, each picking one to aim at. Only one of them screamed, the boy was immediately killed. The others watched, their eyes getting dangerously big. No one failed the curse for the fear to end up like that other kid.

'The next test is to tell how ruthless you really are. Death Eaters have no compassion, they have no mercy, and death is vital. Bring in the test rats!' Voldemort dictated; young Muggle children were carried into the room by the Death Eaters. There were enough for each teenager to have one. Arhimar watched quietly at the faces of those around him.

Draco Malfoy in particular looked uncomfortable. He was standing right up in the front, almost at Voldemort's feet. The child he was



supposed to kill wasn't being helpful at all. It was a boy of about three, Draco wasn't good at judging ages. He was smiling happily with his big, puppy dog eyes warmly looking up at the older boy as if all he wanted to do was play. Dark thoughts crept up into Draco's mind. The boy was just an innocent; Draco didn't even know his name. Who knows, maybe one day the boy would become a wizard.

Was being a Death Eater worth it? The killing, torturing, the hatred and fear most Death Eaters were given. He was above it all; he didn't care for Muggles or half bloods, not enough to waste his life killing them. And beside who wants such an ugly tattoo anyway?

'Malfoy? Are you asleep?' he heard Arhimar's voice ask. Draco waved his wand carelessly and muttered the incantation for the killing curse. He had been one of the last ones standing. Three more had failed their test and were now lying on the floor next to the Muggles.

'For those who remain, you have proven yourself worthy. Clear the bodies and let the ceremony begin.' Voldemort barked.

The corpses were picked up and thrown out of the door; they would be taken care of later. The soon to be Death Eaters arranged themselves into a circle and the adults formed an outer one around them.

Draco let out a relieved sigh, the worst had to be over now he only had to say the words and not scream when the Dark Mark would be burned into his skin. He flicked his eyes around seeing how the others were doing. Most seemed definite of their actions, one boy was reciting the oath beneath his breath. The few others were visibly nervous; one girl in particular had an expression of complete misery on her face. Draco could only wonder why that might be.

Lord Arhimar started the vow. The idea was that everyone would repeat it after him. Most, like Draco already knew the words since childhood when their parents repeated it to them over and over again.

'And from this day forward.'

Draco repeated the line silently counting the number of voices he could hear saying it with him. This was it, the way no going back now. Being a Death Eater was a lifetime job; he would remain a Death Eater until his death, whenever that might be.

'Forever now, I, Draco Malfoy, swear.' Malfoy finished flatly. His father would no doubt be in the outer circle smiling crazily, proud of his son as he never was before.

Spells were muttered, Draco felt his flesh burning and turning black. He shut his eyes and clenched his teeth. It wasn't that the pain was worse than the Critatous, but rather it was different, something Draco couldn't quite understand.

The pain stopped, Draco opened his eyes. On his arm he saw the thing that would change his life forever. To his surprise the image itself wasn't the same as the one his father bore. It was closer to the new Dark Mark, the one that now haunted the newspapers for several weeks.

There was just one more thing to do. Draco joined the line as every Death Eater bowed before the two Lords. Draco did it automatically not caring if his head didn't go low enough.

## Chapter Thirteen- Of Quidditch and Romance

Ron ran to the Quidditch Pitch, his broom trailing on the ground behind him. He tripped over the Front Stairs and nearly fell over. The Quidditch Trials were about to start and he was late. If only he didn't fall asleep trying to complete his homework.

Great Captain he is going to be! Ron still couldn't believe he got the job after last year. Although he had doubts he was the first choice. Harry had been the star of the team, he had been on the team for longest, he had the best broom and he was a natural leader, the DA clearly proved that. And Harry not getting the Prefect job, being the Quidditch Captain was the next best thing.

Ron ran onto the Pitch; everyone was already waiting for him impatiently. He looked around; there were plenty of people to choose from. Most of the team would have to be replaced. Ron wanted better Beaters, Fred and George left and their replacements were abysmal. The chaser positions were open too. Originally Ron thought that he would have to look for a seeker as well, but he remembered that his sister was a replacement for Harry last year and could take over the job this year too. At first Ginny refused, but after much begging she changed her mind.

Ron began explaining how the trials would be staged. Madam Hooch was not able to attend. She had some sort of meeting to go to, so Ron was left alone to do the job.

Actually Ron found out that he was the Captain only a few days ago. Professor McGonagall managed to forget all about Quidditch. It was when the dates for the matches were announced that anyone remembered about the team. It was October, the trials should have been held a month ago. The other teams have already started their practices; Gryffindor would have to work hard to catch up. The first match of the year Slytherin versus Gryffindor as always would be the toughest of the year.

Up in the stands Ginny and Neville were sitting side by side tightly wrapped in their cloaks. From the very top the Northern Wind coming from the mountains made them shiver. The winter was coming

quickly, it was only a matter of time until all leaves would fall and the dark clouds would bring the first snow. Neville couldn't wait, winter was always his favourite season and this year he hoped it would be even better. He had recently got to know Ginny and they decided to stay at Hogwarts for the holidays. It meant he would have to break the tradition of visiting his parents on Christmas day, but he was sure they wouldn't mind. He was growing up; it was time to move on. So this year he would spend Christmas enjoying the surrounding countryside during the day and the warmth of Hogwarts at night; accompanied by Ginny of-course.

The trials began with Ron making every person do five laps around the pitch. Neville hugged Ginny closer as twenty riders zoomed overhead making Neville's hair blow over his eyes. Ginny smiled happily, she had already had her turn on the broom earlier. Neville offered her some help with Herbology and in return Ginny gave him some flying lessons. Actually Neville wasn't as bad as Ron always said, he just didn't have the confidence needed, but with Ginny's help he was getting better. He would probably never be good enough to make the team, but he would be competent at least.

Ginny laughed as an owl flying to the castle nearly knocked it-self into one of the riders. The girl managed to duck in time, but the owl looked quite dazzled. Even in most basic exercises Ginny could see some of the Gryffindors making mistakes. If they couldn't do the laps, there was hardly any chance of him or her to be placed on the team. Now the next exercise started, it was mainly for the potential chacers, they had to pass the Quaffle to the next person. Again there were people dropping the ball and nearly falling off.

'Do you think we'll win the House Cup this year?' Neville asked 'By the looks of it the Quidditch cup is out of the question.'

Ginny smirked. 'After that accident in Preparatory N.E.W.T. Potions, I doubt it. Of-course miracles can happen.'

'Not likely, unless someone does something extremely stupid and Dumbledore takes it as bravery.' Neville replied ' Look, nearly everyone forgotten the Gryffindor losing streak after Charlie Weasley left. How long did that last, six, seven years? I can't ever remember

my-self. The Cup has been awarded so many times, it doesn't really matter.'

'Yes, it's tradition, that's the only thing important that I can see in this.' Ginny said watching as Ron made the Gryffindors shoot into the hoops while he tried to stop them. Most of the time he didn't even have to try, some of the entrants were just an embarrassment to the House.

'It's always Gryffindor and Slytherin, isn't it?' Neville sighed. ' We are always the ones attempting to rip each others throats out. The other two Houses get on with the rest. They don't get the glory and fame, they are called the weaker ones, but maybe they are the smart ones. Oh what am I saying, of-course they are smarter, especially Ravenclaw.'

'No I agree, sometimes I wish I wasn't a Gryffindor. Perhaps then I would have more choice as to what to do, whom to have friends with. The way my brothers talk, Gryffindor is the only House worth associating with.' Ginny groaned.

'It's even worse with an old family where the children are expected to be in a certain House.' Neville shook his head.

'Tom told me that Hogwarts is perfect; it's the House rivalry that taints it. Without it Hogwarts would be what the Founders wanted it to be.' Ginny said sadly. The origins of the school were shrouded in mystery. Perhaps the Founders wanted a light competition between their students to encourage them to learn more, but never to extend it's been carried to.

'It's funny how some are so full of hatred for others they forget what they are here for.' Neville answered, ducking as a Bludger flew directly over his head. The trials continued onto beaters, they weren't looking much better then the chasers.

'I have to wonder which Headmaster introduced the Quidditch Cup. Surely someone would have opposed it, it's such an unnecessary part of school life.' declared Ginny.

'Some students need to do something with their energy. No doubt Quidditch is better than duelling or something of that kind.' Neville laughed as one of the younger kids swung him-self upside down after missing a bludger and leaning too far left.

'Yeah, I can't imagine how much worse Fred and George would have been if they didn't have something to hit a few times a week.' Ginny responded 'It's getting late, do you want to go?'

'All right, it's not like we won't know who got chosen later on. They'll be jumping and screaming around the Common Room the whole night.' Neville said checking he wasn't about to leave anything behind. Ginny and Neville were making their way down a half broken stair ( a first year had crushed into it earlier that day and it was yet to be repaired).

'Look boys, what do we have here?' came a drawling voice from a landing below; three figures soon emerged into full view. Malfoy and his two cronies were standing in Ginny's and Neville's way.

'Longbottom and Weasley, who would have though,' Draco smirked. 'Enjoying the Quidditch Pitch, are you, Longbottom? Watching, that's all you'll ever do. Your granny is too afraid you might fall, damage your head and go insane, like your dear parents.'

Ginny pushed herself between Draco and Neville 'Leave him alone.'

Draco reached out to touch Ginny's shoulder.' Still feisty and still defending the underdog, first it was Potter, now it's Longbottom.'

Ginny threw Draco's hand off as if it was contagious 'Leave Neville and I alone!'

"Leave him alone" that was the first thing you said to me, do you remember?' Draco said slowly staring at Ginny's expression. Behind is Goyle and Crabbe sniggered.

'Shove over and let us through, we don't want to listen to you.' Neville piped in nervously.

'Who said you can speak? Let alone in rhymes! This is between your girlfriend here, and me' said Draco. He must have made some sort of a signal because Crabbe launched himself at Neville and punched the Gryffindor in the face. Goyle reached to hold onto Neville so he couldn't escape.

'Now Weasley, you are smart and if I should saw so, attractive. Surely you can do better then that pile of dung with a bleeding nose.' Draco asked as he stroked Ginny's cheek

'Don't touch me, you dirty Death Eater!' she cried out making Draco slap her lightly.

'I may be a Death Eater, but I am not dirty. I am not a Gryffindor, we Slytherins treat hygiene very highly, unlike you rats.' He growled.

'So you are not even going to deny it, you are a Death Eater?' Ginny grimaced 'I suppose it's the same for your body guards over there.'

Draco didn't seem to be offended, Ginny had to wonder, if she lifted his sleeve, will she see the Dark Mark staring right back at her? Then it would be certain, there were Death Eaters and Spies at Hogwarts.

'You really expect me to deny something like that, besides would you believe me?' asked Draco.

'Ginny, just go, don't worry about me.' Neville pleaded earning himself another punch in the face. Ginny could see a dark bruise already forming around his left eye. Before Ginny could move Draco grabbed her and pulled her closer to him.

'Show, Longbottom, what he deserves!' Malfoy ordered. On command Crabbe and Goyle began punching Neville. Malfoy stayed at his spot, he merely watched not fighting as Ginny bit onto his hand. Neville was now lying on the floor completely still only letting out an occasional moan. Ginny sank her teeth deeper into Malfoy's flesh.

'You still don't know your place, Weasley' Malfoy hissed, he took out his wand and pointed it at Ginny 'Imperio!'

Ginny's face went blank, inwardly she felt just like she was possessed again. She couldn't fight it, her mind simply followed Malfoy's instructions. Crabbe and Goyle stepped back from Neville with hungry looks on their faces, knowing that Longbottom was in no condition to run. Ginny silently grew her own wand and moved to stand right in front of Neville. He moved to retreat, but crawling backwards he found only the wooden wall.

'Crucio!'

Neville screamed, his every nerve cell conducting the pain. Ginny stared blankly at the whaling figure before her not registering her actions.

'Well boys, why don't you help her?' asked Draco nastily. Crabbe and Goyle although mentally challenged knew how to do that spell very well. After all, they had years to perfect the skill. Neville thought the pain couldn't get any worse, but with three casters he could now really understand why her parents went mad. He wondered if he would follow the same path, but soon all conscious thought abandoned him.

'Damn, he fainted.' Malfoy spat at the floor, he heard scrambling 'Someone is coming, lets go!'

The three Slytherins left immediately, Ginny was still standing dazed, her wand aimed at Neville's still form. She shook her head coming out of the limbo that the Imperious had created and kneeled beside him. She felt herself go cold as she thought of the possible consequences, when somebody realized it was her wand that did it.

'What's going on!' asked Ron bursting into the scene. He and some of the others were packing up when they heard screaming. Naturally they rushed to find the cause of them.' Ginny?'

The youngest Weasley looked up, but didn't trust herself to speak.

'What happened?' someone asked, the question was met by silence.



'This is hopeless, get those two to the Hospital wing.' Ron stated grimly. A couple of fifth years picked up Neville while Ron nudged Ginny to come with him.

Half an hour later Ginny was staring at a wall with a very guilty look on her face. She still kept Ron oblivious to the details of what happened and luckily for her Neville was in no condition to talk. Madam Pomfrey was working over the unconscious boy hoping to finish before he woke up. While the Nurse disappeared into her office for a minute Ron tried once again to question Ginny.

'Ginny, who did this?' Ron sighed; having lived in such a large family Ginny was an expert at ignoring those she didn't want to talk to. 'Why was Neville screaming?'

Ginny broke out of her silent spell.' Because I made him to.'

'I don't understand.' Ron moved closer to his sister.

Ginny looked over at Neville 'Again I hurt someone I love without meaning to. Why can't I be strong enough not to listen to what others tell me to do?'

'Oh, Ginny, it doesn't matter, it could have been any of us.' Replied Ron catching up on the story.

'Neville is going to hate me after this, he must have been in so much pain and I just stood there. I should have fought it.' Ginny muttered half sobbing. Ron was at loss as to what to say. It wasn't new; he never had the right words to comfort people. Even when Ginny fell over and bruised her knees when she was four he didn't bother to even try. What a bad brother he was; Bill, Charlie, Percy, even Fred and George...They always looked over their younger siblings. Ron should have looked at them, learned from them. He only had one sister to help and he couldn't do even that.

'Ginny, I promise you Neville won't be mad. He really likes you and he is a very understanding person. He will realize you couldn't help what happened.' Ron smiled soothingly, was that right? Is that what you say?

'You think so?' Ginny frowned, she wasn't used to such words coming out from Ron's mouth.

Ron's smile grew wider. 'Of-course I do.'  
'What's up, Ron?' asked Hermione.

Ron looked first at the letter in his hands then at his girlfriend.' I just got a letter from mum. Percy decided to come back home.'

Hermione sat down next to Ron' Did he apologise?'

'Yes, supposably, there is a short note attached from him. Just said he is sorry about meddling into my life and that he respects Harry. Nothing beyond that.'

'Well, it's an improvement from last year; you have to admit. Do the rest of your brothers know?' Hermione enquired picking the letter out of Ron's hands.

'They were there, except Bill. I don't know what Percy said to make them trust him after the way he treated us.' Ron groaned at the memories.

'You have to learn how to forgive and forget. Your brother wanted to do something great with his life, the Ministry offered him the future he always wanted. He was only trying to do well, even if it wasn't the best way to deal with it.' argued Hermione.

'I suppose, I still wish they didn't welcome him back like that,' Ron chuckled 'Lucky Bill, he doesn't have to deal with this yet.'

'Where is he? I haven't seen him since last year.' Asked Hermione trying to get off the Percy subject without making it too obvious.

'Some long-term mission for the Order, he is contacting different countries hoping they'll agree to help us. He has already been to half of Europe, soon he'll go even further abroad.' Ron explained.' He is off having a holiday, while we have to be stuck here fighting first hand.'

'He is on a mission, that's far from a holiday. Besides it's got to be a taxing job dealing with politics.' Hermione shrugged 'Did he have any luck so far?'

'Don't know, you know how the order is, so paranoid about security they are afraid to tell one other what their mission is.' Ron replied.

Hermione laughed 'The Order has its own problems. Are you going to join the Order after Hogwarts?'

'It seems like the right thing to do. If mum lets me of-course, she is already so worried about the others. She doesn't say it, but you can tell, dad too. I do want to join, really we have been part of this war ever since we went after the Philosopher's Stone.' Ron paused 'That chess game, Dumbledore actually gave me fifty points for that.'

'Yes and you nearly killed yourself in the process.' Hermione giggled making Ron blush. She leaned in to whisper. 'I want you to know; you are my knight, forever. I am really proud of you, heck, I love you.'

Ron kissed Hermione on the cheek gentle feeling her soft skin; he whispered something back to her making Hermione blush. She leaned forward a bit too much while kissing him back and they both ended up on the soft, but prickly carpet.

'We better go, the meeting will start soon.' Hermione whispered a few minutes later. The pair got up and ran down to the great hall still holding each other's hand.

'Ron, Hermione, how good to see you!' they heard Tonks call from across the room.

'Good Evening, professor.' Hermione nodded politely looking judgingly at the Auror's bright blue hair.' Did anyone else come yet?'

'Do I have to subtract points? I already had this problem with my classes. I refuse to be called "Professor"!' Tonks groaned 'No, no one else is here; you are early. Where is Ginny? I thought she'd be here at least.'

'Neville and Ginny had some trouble with a particular group of Slytherins earlier today, they are not well enough to attend.' Ron answered.

'That's a pity, what happened?' the Auror asked suspiciously.

'We are still unsure, they haven't been very forthcoming with the answers.' Ron said looking around the nearly deserted hall. It desperately reminded him of the set up for the Duelling Club back in his second year. In fact it was almost a kind of a Duelling Club that they were about to participate in. Earlier in the week it was announced that any student who wanted to brush up on their duelling skills was welcome to join. Dumbledore made it sound like just another attempt at the Duelling Club, the DA wasn't even mentioned. Ron and Hermione were hopeful however that the DA members would recognise the hint and come, but it seemed their expectations were too great.

Ron and Tonks sat down on the edge of the table that was moved to the side of the Hall. Hermione was left alone to watch out for any newcomers as the other two quietly chattered away about Quidditch. Half an hour later lost all interest in the club, so she settled for recounting everything she had learned so far during the year. Not a single person had come, although she thought she saw someone poking his or her head in, but the person left too quickly for Hermione to see who it was.

'I think this is hopeless, no one bothered to turn up, I doubt they will now.' Ron said finally. Tonks nodded and magically started moving the tables back into place.

'It's been a pleasure talking to you.' Tonks mumbled tiredly 'Good Night, I guess.'

Strolling back towards the tower Hermione frowned. 'I didn't expect a lot of people to turn up, but none at all? I am starting to get worried about the morale of this school.'

'You can't expect them not to be frightened of what is going on around them. The Daily Prophet is going crazy; their parents are talking about how horrible it was before; there are attacks almost every night now.' Ron responded wildly.

'Still, not even the Gryffindors?' I thought we were the courageous House.' reasoned Hermione.

'There is a rumour going around the school, anyone who openly opposes You-know-who will be severely punished.' Said Justin coming up behind them.' From what I heard Neville and Ginny were the first recipients of the punishments, there are more to follow.'

'So that's what happened.' Ron sighed 'But it's not as if the Duelling Club has much to do with Ho-who-must-not-be-named.'

'The Slytherins see it differently and the rest of the school; can forget what they believe if they want to save their own skin.' Justin stated. 'Be careful around Malfoy and his cronies, your view on this whole thing is well known.'

'What about you?' Hermione inquired cautiously.

Justin's face was unreadable 'I will remain neutral in this issue from now on.'

'I see, I don't agree with you, but I know who you are trying to protect.' Hermione smiled sadly.

'Be careful of what you say and where, there are other Death Eaters here apart from Hogwarts.' Justin nodded and left as silently as he came.

Ron looked suspiciously at the portraits on the walls. Spies, Death Eaters, punishments, it seemed Hogwarts was more under Voldemort's control with every passing day.' Do you think Malfoy was the one who attacked Ginny and Neville?' Ron asked.

'He is more than capable, Draco hasn't lost his standing in the school population, and they don't even care that his father is in Azkaban.' Hermione shook her head 'Not that he is, paid his way out probably.'

'More deaths, more fear and a rumour of a new Dark Lord siding with You-know-who.' Ron rolled his eyes and jumped over a false step. 'He is probably just another lunatic who thinks he can do everything, precisely who we don't need right now.'

'I don't know, Ron, Vol-You-know-who is a smart man; he is certainly cunning enough to ally himself with the people he needs. This, Lord Arhimar, who ever he is, could be just as dangerous to us as You-know-who. Hermione replied shakily.

'I doubt it, who can be worse than the Dark Lord?'

'Hello? Ginny?' Neville called weakly, he saw a dark shape sitting on the foot of his bed. His body was shaky, the remains of the spells made his bones ache with every misery move.

Ginny looked up relieved her friend had finally woken up. It was night, most students would be in bed.' Hey, how are you feeling?' she asked

'Not my best, but I'll live.' Neville attempted to smile but faltered seeing Ginny's face 'What's wrong?'

'I am sorry, I couldn't stop my-self, I didn't mean to hurt you.' Ginny blurted out.

Neville sighed he lifted himself up to a sitting position moving as fast as he could to lessen the ache. 'I know I understand, don't worry.'

'I you don't want to be friends with me anymore, it's alright I won't hold it against you.' Ginny went on only half hearing what Neville had said.

'Ginny. Ginny!' Neville paused once he had gotten Ginny's attention 'I do want to be friends with you, I don't care about what happened, don't worry yourself over such stupid things. Remember the insomniacs club?'

'You sure?' said Ginny at least a little relieved.

'Yes, I am positive.' Neville reassured the girl 'Actually I was going to ask you later on, will you be my girlfriend?'

Neville said the last part so fast it all merged into one word, but Ginny understood the gist of it still. Ginny seemed a little uncertain, her experiences with boyfriends have been a little strange, but she decided to put the past behind her for a while at least. She smiled lightly making Neville even more nervous, his face was identical to the one he wore when he asked her to the Yule Ball two years before.

'Yes, why wouldn't I want to be your girlfriend?' Ginny laughed.

## Chapter Fourteen – Of Malfoys and Sneaks

Snape felt his throat go painfully dry as he readied himself. The whole Order was off their rocker. But then, they weren't the ones doing this assignment. No, he was the one doing it or rather attempting to.

After the death of the Minister of magic the matters got more and more desperate. The trail of death didn't stop; it had only just begun. Dozens more members of influential families were found dead, each murdered more cruelly than the last. Such occurrences were not limited to the Magical World either. Almost half of Muggle British Ministers were slaughtered; Muggles were yet to explain how.

Perhaps the Muggles should be told the truth, but as always the Ministry forces down any such suggestion. The Aurors were stretched; there had been virtually no requites for the past decade. Some of the Aurors announced their immediate retirement upon hearing of the Dark Lord's return. They had enough memories from one war; they had no wish to suffer through another. Snape had to pity his sixth and seventh years, the number of requites would triple and it was considered a honourable job. Many would join and many would be maimed or killed on the battlefield before they completed their formal training.

This was why the Order was attempting a rescue mission of sorts. Albus Dumbledore had opposed, but he was overruled and being the least popular member on the team Shape was handed the job.

Throwing a handful of Floo Powder into the fireplace Severus attempted to steady his shaking hands. He had to wonder if Light and Dark were really that different. Both were headed by strong men, but apart from a select few the rest were very much hopeless. Both sides liked to talk rather than do things straight out, both sides had the same religious belief in their cause, both sides could be inhumanly cruel. If you forget the Muggles, the Ministry and the rest of the world it became obvious, the real battle was between Voldemort and Dumbledore. The rest of the population was merely caught up in this struggle of great minds.



And Potter, he was the third; he was the one who had to decide what became of this fight. In many Order meetings Dumbledore referred to Potter as a weapon. The one thing that could set it all right, it was as if Potter wasn't quite human, just something to be used then forgotten. And the Order was now desperate to get their favourite 'gun' back.

Snape stepped out of the fireplace, only to nearly faint. In front of him was a Death Eater practicing his sword fighting. The man had to be a new recruit, he couldn't have been more than eighteen, although Snape wasn't used to judging ages. The Death Eater moved twice as fast as a normal human, but as silent as the night. He swung the blade with precision; the combination was obviously very familiar to him. As he turned to attack an imaginary enemy his robes swished slowly. Severus held his breath when he realised who he was looking at. How could a person change so much in such a short time?

Potter had grown a few inches more; Snape couldn't understand where this height was coming from. Both Lily and James were shortish people, barely above the average height. Harry's hair has changed again, the short locks that remained after his trip to London had grown and now hung loosely around the nape of his neck. But the posture perhaps was the most obvious thing. It lost all its shyness and fear, now there was just an adolescent with arrogance and selfishness written all over him.

'Lord Arhimar.' Snape bowed making Arhimar pause amidst a complicated series of attacks and blocks. 'I wish to talk to you.'

Lord Arhimar put away his sword and walked to stand directly in front of Snape. He looked the Potions master in the eyes and said:

'So you have come to play your pitiful tricks on me?'

Snape shook his head, horrified at the glimmering silver eyes that bore into his own. Lord Arhimar found himself only more provoked:

'Are you going to force your self into my mind as always? Try, you'll find yourself staring at your worst nightmares and I'll be there to see every one of them. Try it; enter my mind! I order you!'

Snape took a step back and found himself right against the walls. Lord Arhimar moved forward and caught Snape by his sleeve. He grabbed the Potion Master's neck.

'Do as I say, it's about time for you filthy wizards to learn what "invasion of privacy" means.' Arhimar screamed puffing like a wild beast. Shape has never imagined he would ever see the boy-who-lived in a state like this. He drew his wand and obediently muttered the familiar spell.

The next moment the only thing he could see was fire. A great fiery beast surrounded by darkness. His vision spun, his skin burned in the heat. Snape's ears ricocheted with thousands of curses in strange tongues that were hot spoken by men. A flash of light and Snape's own memories began to spill out like grains onto sand. All of Snape's defences fell; Arhimar achieved victory where Voldemort could not.

It all stopped, Arhimar decided Snape had enough punishment for the time being. Snape had long collapsed on the floor and was attempting to claw his eyes out with his bare hands.

'Thank-you.' Snape mumbled almost indistinctly.

'What ever for.' Arhimar grimaced spitting on Snape's robes. Severus took no notice, he was twice as pale and he lost his usual sneer. Arhimar kicked Snape with his boot. 'Get up, if you still want to talk.'

Snape to his credit nearly regained his normal, batlike composure. He lifted himself up only to be stopped by Lord Arhimar's hand grasping onto his shoulder.

'Your wand, I don't trust sneaks like you. Snakes you all are, you don't deserve to live, yet alone associate with members of proper society.' Arhimar hissed, he wasn't going to mask his loathing for the Slytherin.

Snape realised that the tables have turned; a few months ago he would have been the one handing out insults. Now he was forced to receive them, at least Potter no longer particularly resembled his father as if they were twins. Severus micked up the wand from the

flood, he had dropped it sometime during his punishment and handed it to Arhimar.

‘Tea or coffee?’ Arhimar asked with a satisfied smile on his face ‘I dare say you do not care much for anything stronger.’

‘Tea is the best, thank-you.’ Answered Shape, he followed the younger man ‘Where are we?’

‘My room, I suggest you make as little fuss as possible. Your screams before, I have no doubt alerted the others in the house.’ said Arhimar casually. He took out his wand and a few later there were two cups of tea and a plate of muffins on the table. ‘Now, Severus, tell me every reason you can think of for me to go back.’

‘What? I mean, beg your pardon, I never said...’ Severus trailed off looking bewildered.

Lord Arhimar sat down on the closest chair and put his feet on the table, right next to the muffins.’ I saw your memories, every single one of them. I think the order of the Phoenix were rather unjust to you. Not that it matters; you would have tried a trick like this eventually, whether independently or by force.’

‘You sound as if you already knew I would come, my lord.’ Replied Snape eyeing the food uneasily. Out of curtesy he should eat at least a little, but Potter was not to be trusted to be honest. Could it be poisoned?

‘Have you ever played a game of chess?’ asked Lord Arhimar ‘Stupid question, it is one of the most popular games at Hogwarts. You would know then the most important trick in the game. Think ahead; guess what your opponent is going to do. That is the only way to win. All that chess really is, it’s a battle.’

Snape frowned deeply shifting slightly in his chair. ‘Are you saying that you spend your days playing and guessing which trick Dumbledore is going to come up with next?’

'No, I am saying that I am learning military tactics and planning to reclaim what is rightfully mine' Arhimar retorted angrily 'Drink.'

Snape's head shot up, two orders that he had taken from this sixteen year old, no more. Arhimar's lips twisted into a smug expression. He picked up his cup and carefully placed it against his lips. He attempted to make it look like he was drinking. Snape accepted the act and took a sip out of his own cup.

'So you want the reasons then?' Snape groaned, before the other could reply he started drinking more and more. 'One, you owe it to your mother. Two, you have to finish your schooling. Three, becau...'

Severus couldn't move beyond blinking; he was completely paralysed. He couldn't even scream. Lord Arhimar strengthened himself, the menacing look back and darker then before;

'Revenge is sweet, Severus. It is sweeter then anything else on this earth. I am sure the Unforgivables have bored you by now and I want to try some of my own inventions on you. No time to waste.'

Arhimar threw Snape on the floor and flipped out Snape's own wand.

Revenge is sweet, my dear sneak. Acerio!

Snape's eyes widened, his fate will be worse then the Longbottoms'. That spell, what ever it was then the Criatous. It inflamed every cell in the body. S human body could not last in suck pain. Lord Arhimar paced around his victim. The old Professor had no idea what was in store for him. But perhaps the best part, Snape couldn't even pass out or go insane during the torture. The potions in the drink took care of that.

Lord Arhimar used up his infantry of fresh spell. Snape turned out to be a fine guinea pig, if he could be called that. The very last spell 'Acuta Afflictaco' proved to be a perfect success. Arhimar looked at Snape's now badly bruised body. He picked it up and threw it into the fireplace; with some luck Snape would crawl out of the right portal, the one leading to Hogwarts.

Ginny was staring intently at the Teachers' table. It was a Tuesday evening and the only Professor who was absent was Snape. It had to be a special occasion; there was no way everyone would turn up to a basic weekday dinner.

'Who is that?' asked Seamus 'That girl next to McGonagall.'

'A student probably.' shrugged Ron not looking up from his plate.

'No, what would a student be doing sitting among the teachers, besides her robes don't have any house insignia on them.' Reasoned Hermione 'She could be one of the Professor's children.'

'It's funny to think about teachers having kids, especially one our age.' Ginny laughed from across the table. 'Who do you think she looks like?'

'It's see to tell from here; all I can tell is that she is blonde. She wouldn't be related to Dumbledore by any chance, would she?' asked Lavender.

'No, all of Dumbledore's family, his wife and two children were killed in 1943 during an attack on their house by Grindewalt. Apart from that Professor Dumbledore has a brother, but he is childless.' Hermione piped in sounding like she was reading out of a textbook.

'How did you find that out?' Neville asked, he never knew any of that.

Ron smirked 'Our Hermione here knows everything, little know-it-all.'

Before Hermione could reply Professor Dumbledore decided it was time to make his announcement. He raised his voice and said:

'We have a new student arriving today. Although this is uncommon such things have happened in the past. She shall be sorted now.'

While Professor McGonagall set up the stool and the Sorting Hat the students were allowed to exchange their amazed and rather confused thoughts on the matter. The Sorting Hat didn't sing, it decided one

student wasn't worthy of a whole song. After a thousand years songs were hard to come by. Finally McGonagall called the name:

'Alya Malfoy!'

The whole school couldn't help but gasp, another Malfoy at Hogwarts? One was quite enough.

'That's definitely Slytherin material.' Ron stated in disgust to the rest of the Gryffindors who largely agreed.

Alya was shaking as she stood up going pale at the attention she was getting. Dumbledore leaned over to whisper something. Alya nodded nervously and made her way to the stool. As she put on the Hat she closed her eyes and desperately bit her lower lip. She then started to have a very animated although quiet conversation with the Hat. Alya's housement took nearly twenty minutes, one of the longest in the century. The hat finally made its decision.

'Gryffindor!'

Shocked silence filled the room; all were wondering the same thing. Since when did Malfoys become Gryffindors? Alya took off the Hat; she looked over to the Slytherin table and went even paler then before. Draco and his friends were giving her murderous looks; she was in trouble. Alya inhaled deeply and marched down to the only available seat at the Gryffindor table, next to Hermione. The students eventually relaxed as the desert was served. Alya stayed quiet, taking small careful bites of her fruitcake and determinately not looking up.

Hermione looked over to the new girl. She had the same, almost white hair characteristic of all Malfoys. She looked thin and was still pale. No doubt the event had been nerve racking, but the Malfoy skin burned so easily Alya wasn't likely to stay outside in the sun for long. Alya slowly turned to Hermione revealing her blue-grey eyes. Hermione put down her fork; the Malfoy girl wasn't much to look at. Pretty, yes, but little beyond that.

'Are you one of the prefects?' Alya asked with a slight French accent.

‘Yes, I am Hermione. What year are you in?’ Hermione replied intrigued, she loved anything to do with France, so she had a lot of questions to ask.

Alya slided lightly ‘Sixth.’

‘Hermione, don’t talk to her.’ Ron cautioned putting his arm on his girlfriend’s shoulder ‘She is probably a Death Eater, all the Malfoys are.’

Alya frowned deeply; this was not something she wanted to go into. ‘I don’t eat death and I must point out to you that the dark lord has been around only in the second half of this century. The Malfoy line goes back to the first days of this school, there is no way all of my ancestors could have been Death Eaters.’

Don’t try to trick us with your lies and half truths, we are not about to fall for them.’ Ron argued.

Ginny pulled her brother back into his chair, sometime during the discussion he had stood up and was now figuring out the best way to jump onto the table. Ginny decided to give Alya a chance:

‘I am Ginny Weasley. The guy who was about to attack you was my brother. I am a year below you, but Ron is with you.’

Alya shook Ginny’s hand not taking any heed of her last name. She was however concerned with Ron, by the way things were going he didn’t take a liking for her. Alya desperately didn’t want to make more enemies.

‘So are you and Draco related?’ asked one of the seventh years.

‘Yes, yes. My father is Lucius’ younger brother, so Draco and I are cousins.’ Alya explained.

‘Why don’t you take a seat on the other side of the Hall then? Together with your slimy brat of a relative?’ Ron smirked.

'That's enough, Ron. You don't know her, but you are already accusing her of being a Death Eater. Do you have any manners, for Merlin's sake!' Hermione shouted at Ron causing a few heads to turn in their direction.

Alya resisted the urge to laugh; the two prefects definitely had something going on between them. She finished off the rest of her desert and left the Hall trying to stick up her nose as high as possible while ducking the flying cupcakes from the Slytherins.

The next week was a torture for Alya, she continually got lost and the others weren't helpful if she asked for directions. Ron used every opportunity to insult her in some way and the rest of the Gryffindors rallied behind him. The Slytherins also saw her as a traitor; Alya was tripped and ridiculed no matter where she went. And the teachers turned a blind eye to it. Snape in particular spend most of the double potions lesson recounting the failures of Alya's mother in Potions although he knew perfectly well she never attended Hogwarts, hence there is no way he could have known anything about her talents.

McGonagall too was not pleased to see a Malfoy either house either, the Transfiguration Professor said nothing, but it was clear from her face every time she looked at Alya's red and gold badge on her robes.

Alya of-course found there was only one way to deal with the situation, pretend she didn't care for it.

'Sur la pom, d'avilion. Oh'y dansi, oh'y dan...' Alya stopped singing abruptly somewhere on the other side of the staircase there were people discussing her.

'Look at her, it's obvious she is a Death Eater! She acts like one, she comes from a family of them and she always wears long sleeves all the time.' Ron was saying

Hermione as always was the voice of reason. 'It's been freezing the whole week, everyone in the castle has been wearing long sleeves.'

'Now, Ron, she is not that bad. Ms. Malfoy is very well brought up, she is polite, graceful and if a may say rather attractive,' came a new



voice that Alya didn't recognise. 'And we know nothing of her mother's family, perhaps she takes after them?'

'I have checked the family tree, the name escapes me but her mother was French and a half-blood.' Hermione replied. Alya clenched her fists; this was going too far, the goody-too-shoes was simply going too far. She was looking where she wasn't meant to.

'A half-blood, eh? Then the Malfoy couldn't have been that bad either if he married her. I actually remember his, Lysander, that's his name. He was a lot kinder than his brother. I have to wonder what happened to him, I heard he disappeared a few years after You-know-who fell.' said the low male voice.

'But Sir Nicholas, what her parents did does not account for her actions. I have to admit she does act like her cousin.' Hermione stated

'You are not jealous of her, are you, Hermione? I heard she is not bad at her schoolwork if given the chance.' said the person Alya assumed to be Sir Nicholas.

Ron sneered 'The Malfoy girl beat Hermione in the last Transfiguration test.'

'From what the Headmaster told me, she had quite a different education from the way we teach here. It would be natural that she would be advanced in some subjects, but I don't doubt she has gaps in others.' Sir Nicolas replied.

'What I don't understand is why Dumbledore even let her into Hogwarts at all.' Ron grumbled.

Sir Nicholas explained 'Surveillance, the same reason with why he didn't expel half of the Slytherin House yet. He wants to see if they let anything slip and he is always looking for spies.'

Alya groaned loudly, so this was all about politics and she actually dared to think that Dumbledore admitted her into Hogwarts out of his compassion. The old man was smarted then she thought.

Alya heard Ron and Hermione coming up to where she was standing; their friend had disappeared through the wall. Alya arranged her face into an annoyed, snobby expression.

‘Ron, Hermione, I need to talk to you.’ She said greeting the pair with a short nod. ‘Come into the classroom.’ She urged them into the empty Charms room, which was as always unlocked. Hermione shrugged and sat down on one of the tables in the front. Ron remained standing not sure if he should say anything.

‘I am sorry for the way I have behaved to the past week, it was most ungracious of me.’ Alya had to wonder why she was apologising to them, but went on ‘I think I need to explain my-self better.’

‘Apology accepted.’ Hermione replied automatically.

‘Look, I have no wish to be here. My father can no longer take care of me, so I was sent here. I spend most of my life in isolation, really I have never been around people my age for long.’ Alya sighed ‘As to why I prefer to wear long sleeves...’

Alya lifted up one of her sleeves to just below the shoulder. From the elbow almost to the wrist stretched a shiny burn mark. Alya showed it to Ron who screwed up his face and looked away.

‘It’s an old injury, but it makes people uneasy.’ Alya explained, Ron muttered something “ Beg your pardon?”

‘Sorry’ Ron spoke up ‘I was a real jerk to you. If the Sorting Hat put you in Gryffindor I should have accepted it.’

‘We all have our off days.’ Alya smiled lightly although her insides clenched uncomfortably. Her conscious screamed, Liar, liar, liar!

## Chapter Fifteen – Of Losses and Joy

The golden ball was tightly clenched in his hand. Around him the Pitch exploded with ear splitting roars, the Slytherin House was beside it-self. The Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws uncomfortably joined in.

'The score is 320 to 90, Slytherin wins.' Brightly announced some third year that was acting as a commentator for the match.

The Gryffindors were crushed; they had just lost their first match of the year and to Slytherin no less. The situation would not be helped by Slytherin seeker, Draco Malfoy would no doubt arrogantly show off about his victory for at least a year. Things were turning for worse at Hogwarts.

Draco Malfoy landed on the ground, his satisfied snark was more evident then ever. His teammates beamed at him while the girls hugged him. The Slytherins rarely showed any kind of open affection, but today they were beyond care. Draco forever had another mission to fulfil. He promised rainchecks to the girls that were draped on his arms and flew over to the Gryffindor stands.

'Which is the best house now? Ah, cousin?' he shouted levering himself with the other Malfoy.

Alya did the most un-ceremonial thing that came into her mind. Muggle tradition or not, there were times when being unladylike was the best. She silently raised her right hand and stuck out her rude finger. The Gryffindors around her chuckled but didn't dare to do more. Draco blushed; he knew what that meant so he decided to revenge Alya later.

Below the Gryffindor team wasn't doing so well. Ron, being the captain was fuming. As far as he was concerned his chasers were hopeless, they couldn't even hold the Quaffle. His beaters had crooked aiming, his seeker half-blind. He had to be the only proficient member on the team.

'Ginny!' Ron called.

The youngest Weasley turned around with tears forming in her eyes. She didn't want to face her House and certainly not Ron. Quidditch meant too much for him, a loss would be a personal insult.

'Why didn't you catch that Snitch! Are you blind? Malfoy saw it and you didn't!' Ron bawled, the eyes of the whole school turned to watch the spectacle but he didn't notice. 'Why for Merlin's sake didn't you see it! Don't you even want your house win! You don't deserve to be a Weasley!'

Ginny couldn't face the others, not even Neville who ran onto the Pitch in hopes of comforting her. She hastily thrust away his arms as he tried to hug her and continued listening to Ron's insults.

'Bitch, after all that training this is how you act! Did Malfoy pay you to loose? I bet he did and you took it. All Weasleys are good at Quidditch, except you! You are the last, the worst of all of us! You should have known when you messed with the diary thing!'

'Ron!' screamed Neville clenching his fists 'Shut up and think about what you are saying! You insensitive idiot!'

'You are the idiot, not me!' Ron shouted back, before Neville could think of a comeback Ron launched himself at the other boy.

Hermione called for someone to stop them as they fell on the ground and continued wriggling between themselves. Three seventh years tried to separate the two, by were knocked back by Ron's fists. McGonagall finally noticed the pair when Ron bit Neville's hand and Neville screamed in pain. She ordered the two to break apart but her words were ignored.

Ginny had more then enough 'Fine, just keep acting lie two year olds. I quit. Hear me, Ron; I can't stand you ordering me around anymore. I quit the team, go find a new seeker.'

Ginny turned on her heel and marched off ignoring the Slytherins as she passed them. Neville rolled away from Ron, his eyes dimly set on

Ginny's back. Ron was lying on the ground muttering long curses to anyone who has done him wrong.

'Why don't you make the Malfoy your new seeker? At least she'll be more of a challenge for me than the Weasel girl.' Draco smirked self-importantly.

'For once, Malfoy, stay out of this.' Seamus replied drawing his wand.

But before he could position himself properly Crabbe and Goyle both jumped on top of him. Within seconds it all turned to pure chaos. Every member of the Gryffindor and Slytherin Houses joined in the fight with only one exception.

Alya calmly stood watching the riot unfold, she was uncertain of what or who to fight for. After seeing Hermione knocked down by a spell shot from behind her Alya made up her mind. She would do nothing, staying neutral was the best answer.

Snape, Hooch and McGonagall struggled to regain control. Standing from outside it looked like a real battle, not a playground skirmish. Snape was certain eventually the Unforgivables would be cast so he whipped out his own wand. McGonagall followed the suit and began stunning the students. It was at least half an hour before the fight stopped completely, in that time the other two Houses hid themselves in the safety of the castle. The punishments were handed to each and every single person on the Pitch. Points were taken, detentions were handed out in dozens these were all cleaning jobs with Filch. A few groaned but not a single apology was heard.

It was Hermione who finally noticed Alya standing at the side of the field. 'Was Malfoy spinning tales or are you really a seeker?'

Alya was slightly offended by Hermione's phrasing and tone of the question. 'He had a first name you know and so do I.'

'So are you a seeker?' Hermione stuck-up her nose, she had just scored several detentions with Filch as well as two with Snape and was not in the mood for many manners. 'Alya?'

'You know; if your captain would have just learned how to keep his temper you wouldn't have to go looking for a new seeker.' She answered.

Hermione stared in disbelief; there were so many things wrong with that statement. For one Alya just insulted Hermione's boyfriend even if they haven't been on a proper date yet. Two, "your captain", wasn't she part of the House too?

Alya sighed 'Yes, I used to play occasionally with Draco as a seeker. I am not horrible; I am not brilliant either. Before you ask, no, I will not join the team.'

'Why not? You even have your own broom, I've seen it.' Hermione said loudly, she knew this wasn't like her at all. But in the past few months she developed a passion about Quidditch and it's long history.

'I don't want to and that's final.'

'If you start playing more Gryffindors will start talking to you. Isn't acceptance important to you at all? Hermione asked pondering why she was trying at all. Even if Alya agreed Hermione had no way of knowing for sure how good or bad Alya was. And Ron wouldn't be rejoiced at having a Malfoy on his team. Sure he didn't taunt her any longer but he didn't like her much either.

Alya sternly looked at Hermione 'I don't care about being accepted, but I do care for my own skin. Take a second to think as to why Draco suggested the idea. He knew that eventually some one would ask me about it. Then I would either refuse and become more hated in Gryffindor or accept and risk the wrath of the Slytherins.'

Hermione snorted. 'Are you actually afraid of him?'

'I know what he can do to me and he won't hesitate if given the chance. He has no compassion left in him. I doubt his mind would even recognise the word mercy. In some way he is more dangerous than his father. Lucius only wants power, Draco wants something more than that by far.' Alya explained stumbling on her words as she spoke.

'So because of your fear you are saying no? You don't belong in this house.'

Alya nodded grimly 'I never did say I belonged here in the first place. As for Quidditch, you take it too seriously. It's a game and today you turned it into open warfare. It looked like a full scale Death Eater attack on Aurors with too many civilians stranded in between.'

Hermione had no words to say as the other girl walked away. Perhaps she had just found the real reason for Alya's boycott of Quidditch. Hermione felt less than happy with what happened previously.

After thinking about it Hermione became concerned that Alya might be in a way telling the truth. So the Slytherins won? Harry, Gryffindor's star seeker was gone and most of the team was new. It had taken Oliver Wood three years to win the cup and that was after the embarrassing defeat to Hufflepuff. Gryffindor couldn't always win, that would be impossible.

Really the cause of the fight had little to do with Quidditch. The two Houses just wanted to have a go at each other. Hogwarts was killing it-self from inside. The fateful song of the Sorting Hat from the previous year echoed in Hermione's ears.

'And we must unite inside her  
Or we'll crumble from within '

Hermione now understood the words clearer then before. But it seemed to her she was the only one who took heed of the Hat's advice. The others have long forgotten the incident and continued hating the other Houses as before. But perhaps millennia of loathing couldn't be turned around so quickly.

Alya, maybe she was the first step, if she could keep the two Houses at bay. Hermione shook her head, she knew next to nothing of the girl she shared her dormitory with. Except the fact that Alya couldn't care less about Hogwarts or the fate of it's inhabitants.

Why did the hat put her into Gryffindor? Yes, it made some strange choices. Harry at times behaved more like a Slytherin than Crabbe and Goyle ever did. Hermione's parents upon hearing of the four Houses themselves swore that she should have been a Ravenclaw. Alya may yet show her true colours when the storm breaks.

Hogwarts and Unity were two words that would never mix; the school would forever be crippled by the fact.

At the Slytherin Manor Percy Weasley was humming to him-self. After recovering from the initial shock of becoming a Death Eater he didn't find it too bad. He had secured him-self a high position in the Ministry when in all the chaos more then a quarter of the Ministry officials were fired. He was now in the same league as everyone else, not shadowed by the disgrace of his father. And the best, he was accepted back home.

Yes, he could have easily lived without his mother constantly bothering him about his eating habits, but the Dark Lord insisted he would spy on his family. So far Percy had done a good job sometimes even catching snippets of plans from the Order. Maybe if Percy could keep up his act he would be asked to join the Order him-self. This would provide an invaluable source of information to the Dark lord, but at the moment he had other things to do.

He knocked on the door his palms suddenly sweating profoundly. The door swung open and Percy kneeled before his lord.

'Rise.' Ordered Arhimar' I don't have time for your whimsical formalities.'

Together they walked down to the lower levels of the Mansion. Arhimar made his every move seem superior to his surroundings. Percy attempted to mimic, but found him-self incapable of doing so.

'Mr. Weasley, do you have everything?' Arhimar asked gruffly, his tone not to be played with.

'Yes, milord, I have double checked everything.' Replied Percy unlocking the door.



Inside the small, cold room laid two figures with gags over their mouths. The one closest to the door was a small man in dirty robes. His eyes looked half mad when he saw Arhimar enter. Behind the man was another figure, who Arhimar had no trouble recognising and even Percy hastily remembered her from his senior years at Hogwarts. She appeared almost asleep and didn't react at all when Percy kicked her.

'Untie them.' Said Arhimar observing the girl and mentally going over their last meeting.

He was interrupted by the man who spat at Arhimar's feet the second his gag was taken off. Percy slapped the man and drew his wand.

'Leave my daughter alone, she has nothing to do with this.' The man risked speaking.

The girl was now perfectly awake and sitting up, 'don't worry daddy, it will be all right'

'Now Mr. Lovegood, your daughter is as involved in this as you are. Did she not last year, participate in a club called Dumbledore's Army? Had she not made acquaintance with Harry Potter and his friends? Did she not go to the Ministry last year and openly attacked the Death Eaters present? Her crimes are as bad as yours, Mr. Lovegood.' Lord Arhimar stated malevolently.

'What are my crimes then?' Luna's father attempted to jump up and become level with the dark lord, but was forced down as Percy grabbed him and threw him back on the ground.

'You have been printing too many inappropriate articles; the public is beginning to rust you more than the Prophet. You are causing unrest in the Magical World. You are a pawn standing in the way, a pawn I need to remove immediately.' Lord Arhimar didn't bother with many more warnings; he simply cast his curses not saying much in between.

He purposely left Luna unharmed in hope of breaking her as she watched her father's torture. Percy stood by unneeded, but a

spectator nevertheless. He decided he would tell his grandchildren of this day and the Judgement of Lord Arhimar.

'Have you had enough, old man? Do you want to die yet?' Arhimar taunted.

Mr. Lovegood could hardly speak, blood was pouring out of his mouth. Nearly choking he muttered 'Yes.'

'NO, Harry, please!' Luna broke out of her self-imposed silent spell, her voice carried more feeling then Arhimar thought possible.

'Don't worry; you shall not live for long with the knowledge of the fact that your father died because of you. Your time is coming, be happy you don't have to go searching for your things after they get stolen all the time. And maybe you'll see your mother' Arhimar answered causing Percy to smirk with indifference. On Arhimar's command Percy dragged Luna over to lie next to her father.

'Death too can be joyful.' Mr. Lovegood spat putting his arm around his only child.

'I am sorry this has to happen. I'll tell your parents and Sirius it is not their fault, or yours.' Luna slowly said turning pale.

Arhimar did not bother listening to anything further; he raised his wand and cast the spell.

'Take their bodies and do something worthwhile with them. Damn the girl, had she not interfered during the attack she would still be alive. Home for the weekend indeed.' Arhimar grimaced.

'Yes, my lord.'

The Dark Lord left the cell immediately putting the latest murders out of his mind. He hurried back to his room, there should be someone waiting for him already.

'Lord Arhimar, Harry.' Stated a female voice just to his left.

Arhimar smiled, Alya was here. He had long gotten her first name out of her, it had been easy, but her last name proved too hard to crack. 'I thought we agreed on meeting in my room so no one would see us.'

Alya took his hand and led him into one of the unused offices, 'Do you think that really matters?'

## Chapter 16 – Of Snow and Sickness

Alya and Harry ran through the first snow of the season. For many weeks snow mixed with rain had fallen and melted half an hour later, yet last night came a large white storm and in the morning the house gardens were drowned in crystal light. Alya sneaked into Harry's room disturbing his study.

They talked for a while about unfairness of school, Harry especially complained about the number of books he had to translate from Latin to English for practise. Alya told him a little about her life in Hogwarts, but the crisp air from an open window drew them outside. They locked Harry's door and crept out of the house.

Harry was glad to touch the frost on the trees and feel the wetness of snow. He hadn't been outside just to enjoy him-self for so long he found it hard to breathe. The stillness of the gardens and the snow-capped trees was magical, Harry grabbed Alya and raced to the deeper part of the surrounding forest where trees became so thick hardly any sunlight penetrated them.

Alya stared around the area; she froze at the darkness that surrounded her. Just seconds ago it was all clear and bright, now she was in the domain of shadow. Harry started a fire with a spell, only highlighting the silhouettes.

'Harry, can we go somewhere else, this place is strange.' Alya begged. Harry turned to her his hair billowing in the tiniest of breezes. He put his cloak over Alya.

'So you can feel it too? Tom told me about this place the other night, I thought it would be harder to find. Grindelwald is buried here, right underneath our feet. After Dumbledore stripped him of his power he fled here drawn by the essence of the house. Grindelwald was ambushed by a group of werewolves, he escaped without being bitten but got lost. He finally fell here weary and starved, so ended the life of one of the greatest men of this century. It is strange how evil leaves a footprint on anything it touches.' Harry said leaning on a tree trunk. The fire burned and flickered, but failed to warm anyone, nor did their clothes.

Harry walked to Alya and hugged her. She felt better yet worse at the same time, Alya could feel the same shadow on Harry and she was afraid of it. Alya fiddles with Harry's hair and said:

'Please lets go. Please, anywhere, but here.'

Harry nodded and extinguished the fire; he led Alya through the tunnel made by the tree canopy. White met them again; the snow was starting to melt. Alya felt a wand in her pocket, but kept it there, the time wasn't right. She kneeled down and collected a handful of snow, it was sticky and watery the perfect condition. Harry paid no attention to her, he continued walking half gliding over the ground, and next second he was hit in the back by a snowbell.

'Hey! What was that for?' Harry laughed and began making his own snowballs, but he had a few tricks up his sleeve. He charmed the balls to follow Alya until they hit her. The pair ran around snickering as Harry got a snowball in his face. He spat out the snow that got in his mouth and threw one in revenge at Alya. Somehow bot of them ended up on the ground their clothes soaked.

'Alya why can't you stay here for a while? It would be so much better. Alya?' Harry rolled to her only to see her stand up and walk away. She brushed her robes and discarded Harry's cloak, but he caught up to her.

'Just explain it to me, I'll undestand.' He muttered

'I can't.'

She marched through the muddy ground towards the house. I am being watched she though. Alya drew her wand, she didn't see who it was perhaps the Dark Lord, perhaps Nagini, the snake didn't seem to care about the weather conditions. Instead another blond met her throwing off his invisibility cloak.

'You call this doing your work? You are actually enjoying yourself; yes, it's obvious. You have enough time, in your next meeting you will do

as I bid you. Understood girl?' Lucius growled. Alya saw his cane was raised ready to strike should she do anything rash.

'Yes, Uncle Lucius.' She cringed. 'But, I wasn't enjoying my-self, see I fooled even you.'

Lucius bared his teeth and threw his hand across her face. His glove was spiked at the joints, the rusty metal cut into Alya's cheek. He said:

'Don't talk to me and don't try to convince me that I am stupid. Both of us wants to get rid of Arhimar, you like him and I find him a good leader. But our opinions don't matter here; I am doing this for Draco so he can have the future he wants and deserves. You are to do as I say while you live in my house and this is how it's going to stay. Remember, one more slip that I hear about and you won't live to your seventeenth birthday.'

Alya stared at him then bowed, she held her hand against the wounds on her cheek that were now seeping slowly and throbbing with her every heartbeat. Lucius grabbed her hair and jerked it sharply so he could drag her with him. Alya cried out in pain as she felt her neck turn at a horrible angle, it stung too. The elder Malfoy didn't let go as he marched to the front door forcing Alya to run after him, she shouted:

'Harry!'

'Shut up! He is long gone and if you make a noise again I will rip out ever hair on your body. Blond locks, you don't deserve to be a Malfoy, half-blood.' Lucius hissed. At the door he released his grip and pushed her inside. Malfoy half tossed her into the fireplace shouting 'Hogwarts'. Alya though her ordeal was over when Lucius emerged from the fire a second later.

'Get out of my sight, while I do my official business in the school and wash your face. You are disgrace to the family.' Lucius said and left Alya be at last.

Lucius found him-self struggling to remember the way to Dumbledore's office. He wondered if he should have taken Alya along to show him the way, but dismissed the idea soon. She was new and didn't know the castle very well, even if she did know the way Lucius didn't want Dumbledore to see her face. The old man would start questioning her about it and Alya wasn't trusted to keep her mouth shut.

Finally Lucius stopped in front of the Gargoyle. The password wasn't in evidence, Malfoy cursed silently, how was he supposed to enter? He drew his wand and hissed to the statue:

'Open, you miserable rock or I'll blast you to pieces.'

The Gargoyle sulkily opened; Lucius assumed Dumbledore already warned it of his coming. He slammed the door behind him meeting only the phoenix's annoyed gaze. The bird had been sleeping happily before he came in. Lucius ignored it and collapsed into a chair in front of the Headmaster's desk, he waited impatiently for Dumbledore emerge from upstairs.

'Lucius, you are here already! I didn't hear you come in, too involved in my work as always. My wife used to complain so much about it. There will be an interesting alignment of the stars tonight, I was just making sure I'll be able to see it later.' Dumbledore muttered, he sat down on his desk and shifted the Muggle newspapers out of the way. He looked up and continued:

'How is Narcissa doing? Draco has shown great improvement in his studies this year, but his behaviour remains shameful to both his house and his school.' Lucius rolled his eyes and retrieved the needed files out of his pocket. He enlarged them and handed them over to Dumbledore. Lucius replied:

'Narcissa is very much fine now that the devil of my niece is out of the house. As for Draco, I am no longer responsible for what he does. Don't try to blame your incompetence on me. If you can't manage your students perhaps you should retire.'

Dumbledore didn't pay much heed to the comments. He shuffled through the delivered papers. The names of the dead and the wounded from the past week jumped out at him.

'I am the only one who makes choices about my life, but I have not forgotten your attempt at sacking me four years ago. And since you mentioned Alya, I am starting to doubt I have made the correct decision by letting her into the school. She hasn't gotten along with the other student well, it is most unfortunate.' Dumbledore muttered; Lucius stood up sharply.

'My brother should have disposed of her the day she was born. How can a person act like an arrogant Gryffindor and be a complete venomous, lying shrew. But she is not my problem anymore, she stays here during the year and in the summer she can just live on the street.'

Dumbledore wondered how Alya kept her cool with an uncle like that, Lucius hated her to the same degree Severus Snape loathed Harry. The elder Malfoy was violent. Sure Alya didn't meet some of the family requirements, but she would make a decent Death Eater. Or already was a good Death Eater as Albus suspected. He folded away the lists, he recognised many names, far to many to his liking. He asked:

'Are you thirsty, hungry? I feel like a cup of tea personally, would you like one also?'

Lucius was about to refuse, but decided against it, he would strike soon. Albus stood up to look for a stray box of sherbet lemons in his cupboard when he turned around Lucius already had his wand pointed at him. Malfoy was proud he had caught the Headmaster unaware; to do that to a man who knew everything was a tough task.

'Tut, tut, you have to watch your back old man. I never thought I would be the one to carryout your death sentence, you have no idea how honoured I am. Ah, you fool though you were safe in your own school.' said Lucius with a snug smile evident. Albus stood frozen on the spot; his wand was left on the table just out of his reach. Lucius cried:



'Stupefy!'

Dumbledore body went rigid and collapsed on the velvet carpet. Lucius came closer and kicked the Headmaster in the stomach. The Slytherin recited the curse from memory:

'Deflagro aspiro dilacero, vapidaro.'

He wasn't sure what the curse did, but he thought it was something about killing a person so it seemed natural. Lucius cast a memory charm for safe measure and left the Headmaster lying on the floor. Fawkes jumped from his resting place and flew over to Dumbledore. If the bird's memory was right his master only had a few months to live. The phoenix shed many tear but none helped, nothing could cure such a curse.

Meanwhile Lucius only had one more thing to deal with, his son. The elder Malfoy found the dungeons without being seen by anyone. He now stood at the entrance to the Slytherin Common Room lost for the password. He tried a few things that came to mind:

'Mudblood, greed, parseltongue, Dark Lord...death to Potter.'

He sighed, most of the time Severus was responsible for the passwords. The Potions Professor was sure to have come up with something harder, like a name of some obscure potion ingredient. Lucius looked around for any students, most of them knew him and would probably let him in.

'Father?' emerged Draco's voice from the doorway. He didn't have his usual gang of cronies with him. 'I didn't know you were coming. Has she done it yet?'

'No, she is being stubborn.' Lucius growled 'Look Draco, you have done well so far, but you are getting too confident. You can't cast Unforgivables at Hogwarts, someone tells on you and you are in Azkaban for the rest of your life.'

'I am a Death Eater now; you said that I was my own man before so I don't have to listen to you. I will manage my life and my attacks how I want. And if Alya fails her job I will kill her personally. I will become the Dark Lord's second in command, even if that means challenging him to a duel.' Draco replied, he stared at his father's uneasy face and turned to leave. Lucius grabbed his sleeve.

'No, you will not. I won't risk my only son to die in the hands of Arhimar or in the vengeance of the Dark Lord!' Draco ripped the edge of the robe out of Lucius' hands and disappeared inside.

Albus spent the next three and a half weeks attempting to understand what was wrong with him. At first he thought it was just a common cold except it was accompanied by terrible stomach aches and his magical power was drained, not the normal symptoms of the virus. By the end of the second week he didn't feel confident enough to perform magic during his classes, just in case he failed to do something. So far no one had complained about the increasing number of experiments students had to perform without previous demonstration.

Dumbledore looked at the newest list, this time brought by Amos Diggory. Albus couldn't recount who delivered the last one, but he was too busy to think about trivial things like that. The numbers and sizes of attacks have increased in the last months so much so that the list was brought early. Beside him Minerva stood up to do the announcement:

'Students whose names will be called need to come to Professor Dumbledore's office. After breakfast, immediately please!' She went on to call the list; Albus tuned her out and concentrated on the students' faces. The expression was nearly the same on each person; he shuddered as two first year girls burst out crying it was painful to watch.

He stood up leaving his unfinished meal on the table, he wasn't hungry, and in fact he was nauseated. Minerva looked at him curiously as he stumbled from his dizziness and nearly knocked his chair over. He hoped she would forget about it, his mysterious illness wasn't anything he wanted to share. There was something about admitting a

problem that made him feel weak, perilous Gryffindor pride still lived inside him. The headmaster stumbled to his office and attempted to rid him-self of the sick feeling, there was nothing he could really do except put some concealing charms on him-self knowing full well it was only a temporary solution.

Soon the students began to come often one by one, but sometimes in twos or threes. Dumbledore rejected that for some it would be the first time they would talk to the Headmaster and for some of those the last.

He lost count of times he presented them with one of the two basic facts, either someone in their family was dead or injured. Not a single child took it well; Albus longed to hug each one, but he couldn't gather him-self to stand up nor would it have been appropriate. He was shocked however by the next name on the list, in a tidy cursive script was written – Fred Weasley. Dumbledore tried to calm him-self as Ron and Ginny entered the room.

'Ron, Ginny, I am sorry to say Fred had been injured in the recent Diagon Alley attack. I can't see George's name on the list so I assume he is fine. You are welcome to visit Fred in hospital, the Portkey has been set up.'

Ron nodded and led Ginny to an old Muggle comic book, the next second they were standing outside Fred's room at St. Mungo's. Ginny was immediately reminded of Christmas the previous year when her father was in the same hospital. The white around her already enticed some paranoia into Fred's well being. She bit her lip and pushed the door open. Inside was only a single bed. Fred's arm was covered in bandages and a blanket was put over his legs to hide the mess that was his right foot.

'Hey guys.' Fred managed to spit out croakily. He smiled a little at Ginny squirming at the blood beginning to appear in the bandage. 'Don't worry, I'll live. No more running around Hogwarts probably, but I'll live. Ron, can you go find a healer somewhere, I am dreadfully hungry.'

Ron was only too glad to leave; he jumped outside and pressed him-self against a wall. He was pale, he knew that, but what did Fred

mean about not running around anymore? Ron wasn't sure he wanted to know; those new spells the Death Eaters used tore people apart into tiny bits. Fred's leg was probably mangled beyond recognition. Ron felt him-self wanting to throw up; he began looking for a healer. The hospital was crowded, there were more patients than they were legally allowed to admit, but every magical hospital in Britain was the same. As he walked he had to struggle through the crowds of visitors milling around many were from Hogwarts or other schools. There were no spare healers to be seen.

Ginny wasn't have any easier time of it. Fred beamed sadly. 'It's okay Gin, they got me on painkillers and my leg will be fine. Its just a big gash.' She could see he was trying to sound brave and calm, but his eyes told her how frightened he really was. She came closer and kneeled down by his bed.

'Ginny, I think I will tell you because I think you are strong enough. Percy has been acting strange, he disappears at unholy hours of the night, and he has all these fancy clothes. Dad always comments how Percy is talking to the big Death Eaters and the last time Charlie came to the Burrow he admitted he had dealing with the Death Eaters. If anything happens watchout for him, Percy spells trouble for the family, but don't tell mum she'll freak.' Fred blurted out; he half regretted it seeing Ginny's horrified expression. 'Shh, Ginny it doesn't matter, just keep this between the two of us. I don't think he is a Death Eater, but he is in a circle he should perhaps avoid.'

Ginny nodded; at least she wasn't kept in the blind as she often has been as a child. In fact she knew more than Ron and that was an achievement in it-self. Still she hoped Percy knew how dangerous it was to make friends with Death Eaters. George chose that moment to come in, he had been waiting outside for a minute or so picking at his scabs and waiting for Fred to finish explaining something to Ginny. By their expression it seemed serious to him.

'Fred, go to sleep as you are meant to, the potion is right next to Ginny. Gin give it to him.' George ordered, he felt he was being overprotective of his twin, but that's what the healer said to do and he would do it. George waited for Fred to swallow the potion making

sure he didn't fake it. Ginny smirked at Fred's light snoring and came to hug George. She muttered:

'What happened?'

'The Death Eaters came; Fred and I were just hanging around when two of them cornered us. I think one of them was Bellatrix Lestleage, certainly sounded like her, but she had one of those masks on so I can't be sure. Fred tried to take her out; you already saw the results.' George yawned and continued. 'That was yesterday evening and I haven't had a wink of sleep. Mum was mortified when they told her and dad kept asking me all these questions for the Order. I stopped answering in the end.

Ginny, the new girl you told me about, the Malfoy one. I think I say her yesterday; she was fighting me or rather just trying to keep me busy. I don't know if she knew who I was, but I think she was afraid to hurt anyone. She didn't put up much of a fight and didn't throw too many serious curses. Look out at what she is doing, I think she will prove important yet. '

Ginny saw Ron coming back with a healer at last, George immediately started talking to the newcomers leaving her to contemplate on what Alya could have been doing in Diagon Alley at the time.

## Chapter 17 – Of Love and France

Harry never felt happier about the amount of time Tom spent locked up in his rooms somewhere in the depths of the House. The allowed Harry free reign over his life for most of the day, sure lessons were hard, but he only needed a couple of hours to complete them usually in the afternoon. Night was the time for secret and death; day was for laziness. Most of these days Harry spent reading or practicing his skills, he did always hope for Alya's company and today he was lucky.

They sat inside; it was far too cold to go out. The windows in thick hoarfrost, this year it would be a truly white Christmas like in fairytales.

'The end of term feast will be in three days, all of the Gryffindors are leaving except Ron, Hermione and I. The holidays are going to be torture, those two will be kissing all they long, Ron will be accusing me of being a Death Eater and Hermione won't stop bothering me about homework.' Alya complained while lying on Harry's lap. He paid little attention; Harry always became distant when she mentioned Hogwarts. Or the sake of courtesy he asked a question:

'What about Ginny and Neville?'

Alya laughed slightly' Neville invited her to stay with him and his grandmother for Christmas. His parents are out of St. Mungo's too. The hospital is too busy to keep long-term patients now. Hey, didn't Ginny used to have a crush on you before?'

'I don't remember.' Harry shrugged. He heard a house-elf approach the door, one you became familiar with their magic it was easy to track their movements around the house. The creature brought a new tray of tea and biscuits for them, Harry adored tea and Alya sometimes nibbled on the biscuits. She sat up to grab the choc chip ones before the nonexistent competition got to them.

'Harry, why did you leave Hogwarts? I asked you before, but you didn't give me a proper answer. Do you remember anything about Hogwarts?' Alya asked she stuffed the whole biscuit in her mouth resembling a hamster. Harry sipped on his tea not caring for the flavor; he just needed the warmth. He took his time relying.

'I recount there being a reason, but it wasn't a particularly good one. I was angry I think.' Ha flexed his wrists noting the thin white scars that remained, he lowered his hands those were not for Alya to see. 'Hogwarts, I was always sad at Hogwarts. There were people who hated me and...someone died. People pushed me around, I had to do what they told me, I was so angry at them.'

Harry trailed off flinching once in a while as he attempted to recount his previous life. Alya looked away, she wanted to blurb out her every secret to him, but didn't dare. If he wouldn't reject her others would take their revenge. Yet the room was so peaceful it felt like the perfect time for the truth, Harry didn't miss the mood of the atmosphere either. He finished his tea not looking at the leaves at the bottom poured him-self another cup.

'Alya, we've been friends for a while right? I have a confession for you.' He said becoming nervous at Alya's shocked face. Just if she took it all wrong Harry leaned to her and kissed her lips gently. He didn't dare to go further, he was too scared instead he continued talking.' Ever since we met you've changed my life. I thought before that I knew what emotion was, but I was so wrong. When you are here I feel that I am the happiest man in the world, when you are not I am dead. Every single moment of my day I think about you. While I am reading, instead of sleeping even while I am killing. I killed a child yesterday, I mutilated her, but all I could think of was how you are doing. No food now drink can help me, only you cheer me up. You are all that matters to me without you I couldn't exist. Alya, I don't know much about you, but I know I love you.'

Alya's heart froze; she grasped her head and shut her eyes curling into a ball. No, she couldn't believe it, no, not to her.

'Precisely Harry you know nothing about me.' She hissed shakily opening her eyes again. 'No, you don't love me; you can't love me. Both of us will die for this.'

'Alya!' Harry shouted she stopped her wild muttering. 'I don't care if you are a mudblood Hufflepuff; I assume you are not because you always talk about Gryffindor. I don't care who your parents are or who

you are related to, Tom won't either, I can give up all this, we can hide from everyone and just live alone, Alya.'

She shot up feeling the knife hidden in her belt. He was defenseless she should strike now, end the whole mess forever. Alya drew the weapon and jumped at his tears blinding her. The blade found his throat; she wiped her tears and looked into his scared, green eyes. Time stopped, what was a second felt like eternity, Harry didn't dare to move.

'I hate you!' Alya cried releasing her hold; she let him go half hoping he would finish her off in revenge. 'I hate you! Look what you did to me. There is no such thing as love; it doesn't exist. People get married for fortune or protection, but not for love. I don't want to see you ever again! I hate you! I HATE YOU!'

Alya threw her knife away, there was no use to a weapon she couldn't make her-self use. She avoided Harry's panicking eyes as she left through the fireplace. He could barely breathe, he worried previously about her not sharing his feelings, but he didn't expect an attempt on his life. Harry almost heard his heart shutterer and sizzle into nothing. He threw the tea tray across the room then the kettle; piles of books followed and china shards came soon after. He ripped his robes into shreds screaming.

'Alya!!!'

There was no reply, he collapsed on the floor sobbing, with his nails he created ten deep gashes across his face. It didn't help to release his anger. Harry finally stilled, blooded flowing freely across his face onto the carpet and drying into a sticky paste.

'Harry? Open the door, please, Harry? Are you in there? What was all the crashing and screaming? Harry? Harry!' he dimly heard a person call his name. The door was locked, the man took first shook it then tried a spell, failing he just broke the door in half. The man's footsteps were sharp; with each one Harry felt the ground vibrate slightly. Harry couldn't see anything let alone the man; blood seeped into his eyes blinding him. Tom's voice, Harry finally recognized it and groaned. Riddle was worried, but all Harry could hear were the echoes.



'Harry, what happened here? Get up.'

Harry made no move; Tom sat next to him observing the torn clothing and the scratches on the boy. Harry's room was a disaster zone, half the furniture broken or at the very least turned up side down. Tom found a handkerchief in his pocket and carefully wiped the blood off, he left it on the side of him. Tom attempted to communicate with Harry again; he shook the boy and failing that begged

'Come on boy, this is not funny. Did someone attack you or did you hurt yourself? Harry, you have to get up, I need your explanation.'

Harry's eyes snapped open, Tom shuffled back seeing the confused mix of colour –green, silver, black and even a bit of red thought for dominance. Tom regretted his move as Harry shut then again, Riddle picked the boy off the floor and carried him to a bed next door. Tom left for a minute and returned with a bunch of potions; Harry remained still all through the healing process. Tom was just about to give up when Harry muttered:

'Why did you come into my room? You always ask me to come to you if you need me.' Tom caressed the boy's freshly healed cheek.

'The handguns have arrived with the bullets. I was going to hand you yours. The rifles will be here soon too; the Death Eaters in charge have done a good job the Ministry didn't even suspect the attacks were connected to us. Now, what happened to you that you ended up in this state?'

Harry sat up in the bed disoriented by the blue sheets and blanket; his were white and black. He was lifeless and angry at the same time. He said

'It had nothing to do with you; I don't trust you to understand. Where is that gun? I want to shoot something.'

Tom picked up the box and shook his head. If Harry didn't trust him to understand whatever happened he didn't trust Harry to use the

weapon wisely. Self preservation was not exactly Harry's strong point, Tom withdrew the box from Harry's reach saying:

'You are not emotionally stable for a gun right now. Sort out what is wrong then we will talk about a weapon. No, don't argue. I am definite about this, you live in my house you will respect what I say. Tonight you will stay here cleaning your room and after translating a text for me, a particularly long one. If you finish before my return, feel free to take your anger out on the Chang girl, but not on yourself.'

'What!!!' Harry exploded. 'Are you my mother now? Give me the gun; unlike most wizards I actually have some idea about how to use one! And I am not about to be punished either! Cleaning? Translating? I am not your servant!!!'

'I am only trying to stop you doing anything stupid. The house-elves don't deserve to clean up the mess you made. You will do as I say even if I'll have to chain you or put you under the Imperious and there will be no sharp things in your room. I will put a house-elf to watch what you are doing apart from that you will be alone to contemplate your actions.'

I am fed up with your behaviour, for weeks you have been having guests here without my permission. You don't finish what is asked and when it is finish it is a waste. Perhaps you should realize that I have been around far longer than you, I am not a fool. You will do my every whim until you confess the truth.' Tom finished; he left Harry bewildered storming off to the dungeons. Harry was left to just gape at the locked door.

Alya burst into the Common Room not caring if she was about to invade someone's study session or a private conversation, as she would have done otherwise. She succeeded only in scaring a bunch of First Years by her tear-flooded face. Alya felt like strangling them as the kids ran away, she already thought of her-self as a monster they didn't need to encourage the idea. She scowled at the few older years that remained and fell on the floor staring at the deep scarlet carpet.

'Red, there is so much red.' Alya whispered and even quieter still 'Everywhere there is it all. I don't deserve red; I don't deserve anything. I should just let them take me to Azkaban. '

Alya pounded the floor and crawled to the edge of the stairs to the Girls Dorms. She was repulsed by all the crimson and gold that met her – the walls, the doors, even the ceiling. Her vision swam, somewhere between tears and denial her brain decided it had enough, she blacked out.

What seemed like the next second was far later in the afternoon; she opened her eyes and was met by Hermione's concerned face. The prefect had ordered Dean and Seamus to carry Alya upstairs after they found her unconscious; it wasn't likely Alya would have wanted madam Pomfrey's attention.

'Hello, are you feeling better? Does it hurt anywhere? Would you like anything? Should we tell Professor McGonagall.' Hermione asked feverishly, she stilled at the look the other girl gave her. Alya shook her head and turned away, one of the worst people to talk to would be Granger.

'You sure? You missed on half a day of school, I got your homework of-course, but you need to get studying seriously. Your marks have been dropping, you are a bright student, possibly smarter than I am, but you never try to learn and the amount of class you've been skipping is unbelievable. Professor McGonagall no longer bothers to call your name when she is marking the roll; you are never there. I've checked your record, you didn't do the OWLs but there was something equivalent to them and you had the top marks. This is your second last year of school, you have to make the most of it ff you want to have a decent living in the future.' Hermione delivered her speech feeling responsible for each student in her house.

'Unlike with you, Granger, my family's standing will provides me any job I wish. I don't need the perfect marks; there is simply no point to them or anything else in my life. My existence will end shortly.' Alya snapped back making Hermione wonder at what could have caused such a bad mood. She decided not to press the matter and left Alya to face her nightmares alone.

Alya threw off the blankets; the heavy material was smothering her. She thought of calling Hermione back, to apologise, maybe even to explain, but she didn't have the heart to. Alya rested her head on the pillow thankfully black, she would have tore it up had it been any other shade. Slowly she slipped into a flash back if a night she didn't want to remember at all.

Lucius was standing in front of her in his best robes and cloak, he was ready to leave for some ministry party, but there was plenty of time yet and he didn't want to waste an opportunity. Alya bowed her head as he asked:

'Has your father ever told you the difference between males and females in this family?'

'He has spoken to me about it on occasions. The men think only of honour and protecting themselves. The women must do everything to protect the family – disgrace, torture, death applies also. He wasn't fond of the concept I must say.' Alya muttered keeping her head down, Lucius' cane struck her arm. He raised her chin to see her frightened eyes.

'I don't care what my dear brother thought about the facts of life, he has no say in your present situation. I have a task for you that you will do if you don't want to end with a wand pointed at your heart.'

Alya felt uncomfortable, she doubted Lucius would ask her to do anything pleasant and it seemed important to him. She would have to do it properly.

'What is it, uncle?' she asked.

'I want you to kill Harry Potter. It would too dangerous to attempt a spell; magic will be traced. Potions also, the dark Lord knows of our extensive supply and Potter will be careful to avoid poisons. No, I want you to lure him into the trap. Meet him, become his friend, his beloved, and his trusted then at the opportune moment kill him. Do you understand?' Lucius explained, he held the cane up ready to hit

again if needed. Alya wondered to ask why, but her fear won over her curiosity

'Yes, I understand, I must be branded then also if he is to trust me?' Lucius laughed, now the girl was coming to her senses, perhaps he would yet make a decent Malfoy out of her. He relaxed and said:

'You will be accepted together with Draco, you will meet Potter then. Don't tell him who you are or he might mention something to the Dark Lord, we do not need any more suspicion into our family loyalty, the Ministry is enough.'

'Certainly, Uncle, a Death Eater I will become if you shall order me so.' Alya stated, inwardly she wanted to scream. The last thing she wanted to do was to kill a man, let alone someone so important. She wasn't an assassin; she wasn't a Death Eater. God, Death Eater, she didn't want to think about it, the betrayal that would be. Alya prayed others would understand what she had to do to protect her well-being and sanity from her Uncle.

'Think about how you are going to achieve this, I must leave.' Lucius paused 'Please, do not fail; the family had suffered enough from your traitor of a father. He was always weak, ever since he first met your mother. He was lucky our father had died by the time or he would have found his end far earlier.'

Alya watched him leave cold sweat accumulating on her face. Her father, what would Lucius know they haven't met in a decade at least. She returned to her room ignoring Narcissa's angry yells at some unfortunate house-elf. Alya didn't care; she began packing her few things she owned. Hogwarts, Draco, the others waited there to torture her further, but she was half glad, Lucius wouldn't be there to threaten or hurt her. Only Draco, the mini-devil.

Alya emerged from the memory; she had thought Hogwarts would be her salvation from the horrors of her family, which never happened in fact it seemed worse now. Alya whimpered in pain as her dark mark began burning. Another call to another killing, she didn't even want to know about it.

She waited for a minute for the pain to stop, but the burning continued. She cursed and climbed under the bed to get her mask and robes. Alya didn't dare to put it on yet, most of the students were in the tower, she couldn't risk them seeing her. Alya found an unused fireplace in one of the empty classrooms; the Dark mark still throbbed uncomfortably.

Voldemort's annoyed gaze met Alya; she bowed and apologized for the lateness preparing to take the punishment. It never came; the Dark Lord watched her slip on the robes and the mask making Alya hurry more. He was suspicious of her she knew, but of what was a mystery, perhaps Harry had spilled the truth or it was her allegiance.

'I am ready, my lord.' She muttered; Lucius and Narcissa scowled at her. Without warning a strong hand grabbed her neck, Draco's voice was impatient.

'Have you finished your job?'

Alya was about to cry out to Voldemort to get him to let her go, but the Dark Lord left the room and he wasn't anybody who would protect her. She turned to face Draco and pushed him into the shadows of the room. None of the other Death Eaters saw them, but Alya felt safer. So close to other people Draco wouldn't dare to do anything too rash.

'No, I haven't.' Alya said. Draco's eyes narrowed, he hissed:

'This is not your choice, if you were ordered to kill him you will. My patience is running short, if you don't get rid of Potter by the end of the war I shall kill him my-self and then you. Family or not, incompetent wimps should be disposed of.' Draco spat in Alya's face as she continued staring into his eyes 'It's either his life or yours.'

'Draco, if you will.' The Dark Lord's voice came. Both Malfoys returned to the main crowd, all the Death Eaters were now assembled; Alya felt dark foreboding – something big was stirring. Voldemort spoke softly, but in the solemn, scared silence his voice was clear 'Lord Arhimar will not accompany as tonight; I want you to

take charge in his stead Draco. I need your father with me this evening.'

Draco was only too happy; he shot a proud look at Alya and said:

'I will be honoured, my lord.'

Half an hour later the Dark Lord finished explaining all that was needed of Draco. The boy kept nodding all through the lecture wondering what misfortune might have struck Potter. Voldemort divided his men in half most of the older Death Eaters went with him. The younger generation had their chance to prove themselves. They apparated in the quiet gardens of Beauxbatons.

Alya studied the surroundings; the place was magnificent far grander than Hogwarts was in its finest. Each leaf was perfect; each flower in full bloom, a hundred glittering statues of French wizards and witches lined the paths. She longed to gape more, this could have been her school if her grandmother's wishes were respected, but Draco wasted no time. He ordered to set the gardens on fire and overturn the statues, his cronies - Crabbe and Goyle were only too happy. With whatever basic magic they could perform they caused their havoc while the rest marched to the main school.

Beauxbatons didn't have the same aura of age and decay as Hogwarts, the building looked in its prime and glory. Distantly nymphs could be heard, the creatures danced and sang for the students as they ate their dinner. Draco peered through the frozen glass at Madame Maxime and the staff; they were blissfully unaware of the enemy just outside. He shouted the signal and Death Eaters swept into the hall.

Blue uniforms of the students lost their brilliance; cries in both English and French filled the room; the Death Eaters shot their spells with frightening accuracy. Students and teachers fell to the wand. They had considered themselves safe, removed from the fear of the Dark Lord, the school offered no protection and the teachers had no idea how to handle the situation. Draco knew it and he was sure Beauxbatons was already doomed.

He grabbed a girl by the hair and forced her to the ground. He arrogantly asked:

'What's your name, pretty?' she held no reply, Draco looked into her frightened eyes and mentally smacked himself. He tried again; thankful for the lessons he had in childhood 'Comment t'appelles-tu?'

'Gabrielle.' The girl stuttered, in other situations she might have understood English but her fright forced her to forget the basic things. Draco knew enough, he unzipped her dress and gave her a kiss. Crabbe and Goyle took his lead and found themselves some entertainment too.

Alya grabbed a first year by the looks and threw her out of the hall muttering to run and alert any authorities that might help. She winced at the screams of the raped and stunned attacking teacher. Madame Maxime proved the only one causing trouble, their spells had problems working but she was now cornered by four death eaters. They threw the killing curse at her; she fell on the marble with a crack. Alya stepped on another body, the blue robed ones were plenty, but the red and black fallen were hardly seen, just two on the other side of the hall.

She raised her wand as a boy tried to curse her, she noted how few there were in ratio to the girls. She really had nothing against him, but he did try to hurt her.

'Crucio!' she shouted, he screamed in a high-pitched voice until she let go out of sheer pity. This was an evening from hell, for both of them.



## Chapter 18- Consoling and Talking

'Malfoy!' Snape growled from inside his office 'Come here!'

Alya stood outside in the torch lit corridor shaking her head. The frustrated scowl of the Potion Master was the last thing she wanted to hear especially at that time of night. Walking up to the doorway Alya snapped sharply.

'I hate the name "Malfoy, don't ever call me that'

' That's your name so that's how I am going to call you' Snape replied  
' Come inside, you know I don't like repeating my self.'

Alya groaned softly entering the office. The Professor was sitting at his desk, no doubt marking another set of essays from some unfortunate class. The walls of the room it-self were made out of solid stone, which were painted black sometime ago. Now however the paint began to peel off with age. About half a dozen candles floating around in mid-air lighted the office. As the candles changed their position every few minutes the light also flickered slightly. Alya shivered a little and wished she had brought her cloak, the dungeons as always were freezing cold in the winter months and Snape's rooms were no different.

Alya slowly reached for her wand, concealed in her sleeve. As far as she knew Snape was on the good side, but these days no one could be sure about anyone, even at Hogwarts. Snape looked darkly at Alya while chuckling at the same time.

'Put the stupid stick away. If I wanted to kill you I would have done it a long time ago.'

Alya quietly toyed with the idea of cursing the teacher, she decided against it as she assumed it would cause a few problems in the long run. As a Gryffindor she couldn't give up so easily, she said.

' I will if you swear not to call me "Malfoy" again.'

‘Fine’ Snape replied not thinking about holding up the agreement for even a second ‘ I just want to know what you are doing in my dungeons this time of night, or morning, which ever you prefer.’

‘Your dungeons? The last time I checked this was part of the school which I happen to be a student at.’ Alya answered returning her wand to its holder. She sat down on one of the moth eaten chairs in front of the desk.

‘ The dungeons have always been reserved for the Slytherins. And may I mention the fact that it is several hours after curfew for students.’ Snape stated putting down his quill. This discussion promised to be a lot more exciting then a set of second year essays about a basic potion that they couldn’t even manage to brew.

‘I am a Malfoy. Shame of my family I might be, but I am still a Malfoy. As my cousin insists on saying and proving- the rules that apply on the rest of the world don’t necessary apply to us. ‘ Alya made a face ‘ In many cases I believe he is right.’

‘ A Malfoy or a Potter, I don’t care you have avoided my question. What are you doing here?’ Snape asked slightly annoyed at the fact that a person could be ashamed and proud of their heritage at the same time.

‘What could I be doing?’ Alya said with a grin spreading across her face.

Snape replied ‘ Anything from hoping to get into the Slytherin common Room to stealing Potion ingredients from me.’

‘ If you must know so badly, I was thinking.’ Alya said fiddling with the edge of her skirt. In truth the stern Professor was starting to creep her out.

Snape raised an eyebrow ‘ Anything in particular?’

‘Harry Potter.’ Alya replied. She couldn’t help but smile at the expression on the Potionmaster’s face, it was a strange mix of confusion, curiosity, hate and surprisingly... anticipation.

'Why is he so important to you all of a sudden?' Snape asked after a moment 'I don't believe you ever met him.'

Alya sighed, what is she supposed to say now? She snapped sharply:

'He is the boy-who-lived, isn't he?'

Snape suddenly looked slightly sick 'Don't tell me expect the boy to march in one lucky day and save the world?'

'I don't expect anything, not from him anyway.' Alya shrugged.

Professor Snape tensed abruptly. 'You are hiding something; don't even dare to lie to me. Tell me!' he ordered.

'What am I supposed to tell you? I talked to him, but he doesn't know me. Most likely he thinks I am just another Death Eater trying to win the favour of the Dark Lord.' Alya said carefully staring at the floor.

Snape however wasn't fooled; he sensed something wasn't quite right. Over the years he had learned to recognise a lie if he heard one. He hastily probed the girl's mind wondering at the fact that there wasn't a single barrier to stop him from doing so. Snape's jaw dropped as he reached the memories of Harry. Slowly he looked up cynically at Alya.

'Some things are better shown, not told.' Alya shrugged again.

Snape asked 'You knew I was going to do that?'

'It was only a matter of time until you tried, I hoped you didn't mind that I helped?' Alya replied.

'He told you about the prophecy.' Snape mumbled. 'Don't tell anyone, not even the people you think you can trust.'

'Calm down, I am not the stupid blonde everyone takes me for. Harry already made me swear not to tell anyone.' Alya said.

'You just told me.' Snape said

'You already knew, there is no danger in that.' Alya replied 'Should I leave right now, before we find another revelation we need to discuss?'

Alya silently prayed that he would just let her go, she didn't want to talk about Harry, especially to some teacher she hardly knew.

'Wait, explain to me, why did you ran away from him?' Snape asked. 'Surely you knew you loved him a long time ago?'

'Some things are not as simple as they appear to be. What will Lucius do when he finds out? What will Harry think when he finds I am related to his arch-enemy? What about Voldemort?' Alya asked.

'Dark Lord.'

'Whatever.'

'Well tell me then, why the hell did you go and meet him in the first place?' Snape half shouted. There were a few people that dared to say the Dark Lord's name, fewer yet that said "Whatever" when referring to him. A sixteen year old shouldn't be one of them.

'Because.' Alya paused staring intently at the wall behind Snape. She choose to lie, Snape was unpleasant when angry, but Lucius was deadly. 'Because, I hoped I might make him change his mind about joining the dark side.'

'Noble purpose, but a dangerous and stupid one too. Did you think what he might do to himself after what you said to him?' Snape asked, passing the lie. 'He had tried to commit suicide once before, for a very misery reason I might add. But love drives people to insane things; it is a lot more powerful.'

Alya swore loudly in a very un-lady like fashion, she hadn't really thought as to how Harry would react. Darn, maybe she had killed him after all.

'What are we supposed to do now?' Alya asked, somehow the floor was starting to look very interesting.

Snape shook his head. 'Hope I suppose. Hope and pray.' Alya laughed bitterly

'Look, there is always hope, we just have to find it. Let's face it, it's not as if Mr. Riddle is the only Dark Lord in the history of the earth. None of them ever succeeded.' Snape stated grimly, he clenched his fists until he could feel his nails digging into his skin. 'Last time he rose, we thought we were lost, but Harry saved us.'

'He didn't save us, he brought us a couple years of freedom, that's all.' Alya argued.

'These few years might make all the difference.' Snape stated. 'We have a new generation of Auror's now; we have better technology and protection. All we really have to do is to stick together.'

They sat at silence for several minutes neither of them looking at each other. There was little to say. When the clock on the wall chimed two in the morning Snape ordered Alya to get to bed and returned to marking his papers.

Alya nodded, on her way out she whispered 'Thank- you, but don't expect me to change to Slytherin all of a sudden.'

'Not in my wildest dreams would I dream of that.' Snape replied smiling. 'Oh, fifty points off Gryffindor and a week's detention for wondering the halls this time at night. Next time I will take you to McGonagall, is that understood?'

'Yes, sir'

Snape sat at his desk for a few more minutes finishing off the last of the essays. He then stood up softly as he legs were numb from many hours of sitting. He went to bed, at least two hours earlier than usual.

The next morning Alya over slept and no one bothered to wake her. So she had to run down to the Great Hall for breakfast still buttoning up her shirt. She sat down next to Colin who cheerfully told her every little detail about his dream from that night. Alya made a few half interested responses while filling up her plate. The omlette served was definitely not to her tastes although she started consuming it without complain.

Still only half way through her serve she noticed a small shine of platinum white hair from the corner of her eye. She whipped around nearly knocking over the jug of Pumpkin Juice on the table.

‘Good morning, Alya. Did you enjoy the party on the weekend?’ Draco asked smiling.

As every other day he had his hair gelled his hair back and was wearing the most expensive robes that could be brought. Behind him stood his two ‘bodyguards’ copying his sadistic grin.

Alya forced herself to open her mouth. ‘It wasn’t too horrible.’

‘Yes, sure. You should have seen the look on your face when you saw those bitches getting what they deserved, scared shitless you were.’ Draco said

‘What are you talking about Malfoy?’ Ron said barely understandable as he had his mouth stuffed with food.

‘Your dear friend didn’t mention where she was on Sunday evening, did she?’ Draco laughed.

Ron stood up raising his fists. ‘What are you talking, about you bloody snob.’

‘Ron, stay out of this, please.’ Alya asked.

‘Oh come on, darling. You are leaving your friends out of the picture. Why not explain to them where were you when all the normal people were sleeping.’ Draco laughed, behind him Goyle and Crabbe followed his lead.

Alya glanced around; most of the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff tables were listening. If they were to fight later they'll probably ask for an explanation, one she didn't want to give. Better try to keep the other houses out of this Alya decided. She looked at the teachers; all of them were oblivious what was happening. Alya stood up so she was almost straight in front of Malfoy's face.

'Fuck off.' She hissed. 'Before I decide to tell everyone what you were doing during that time.'

Draco laughed even louder. 'Oh, boohoo. I am so scared.'

'Did you see how the frenchies were wailing?' Goyle said in a very stiff voice. 'We had a lot of pleasure from these whores.'

Alya felt like she was about to throw up not only her breakfast, but also every piece of food she had eaten in the last month.

'Why do you even keep these monsters around you, Draco?' Alya asked suspiciously.

'Because they are good for dirty work.' Draco said, glancing back at Crabbe. 'I hate dirty work.'

'Will you just leave her alone!' Lavender asked.

Both Malfoys ignored her, Alya asked. 'What do you pay them with, food?

'No of-course not. They'll get their prize when I get you. They have been promised that they could try you out sometime, before you die.'

Alya went pale and if possible became even more revolted. She was sure that given the chance Crabbe and Goyle would do the same thing to her as they did to several girls at Beauxbatons.

Without any warning she lifted her hand and made it connect with Draco's nose. He bent over grasping his face more out of shock and anger than pain. Alya was relieved that Crabbe and Goyle were not

taking immediate revenge; they stood absolutely still awaiting instructions from their ringleader.

Alya thought she might have been imagining things, but she thought she saw Snape clapping softly. The Gryffondor and Hufflepuff tables burst into an unlikely applause

‘A hardly appropriate behavior for a Gryffindor, Ms. Malfoy, report to me for detention tomorrow!’ Professor McGonagall called out. The Slytherin Table laughed loudly.

No-one tried to argue with McGonagall like they would have done with any other person. Alya picked up her bag and avoiding Draco’s murderous gaze walked out of the hall.

As she climbed the staircase she heard the main doors burst open. Turning around she saw a bureaucratic looking man entering the school. He turned to find the Great Hall. Alya decided that this looked important so she retraced her path and followed the man. He marched straight to Professor McGonagall and whispered a few words with her before handing over a small letter. The Deputy Mistress visibly paled and stood up slightly shaking.

‘The Weasleys, please come with me.’ She said in a frozen sort of voice. The whole school suddenly went dead quiet, not even one sadistic comment could be heard from the Slytherins. All that was audible was the shallow breathing of the Gryffindors. Ron and Ginny exchanged glances and unhurriedly ambled down to the Teacher’s Table.

‘Hurry up you two.’ Ordered McGonagall. She led them out of the room.

‘Should we sneak after them?’ Neville whispered to Hermione

‘Let’s not, we’ll be in big trouble if they catch us, plus Ron and Ginny will tell us anyway.’ Hermione replied. ‘We better get going, we’ll be late for Charms if we won’t hurry up.’



Alya watched wordlessly then turned around and walked off to her next lesson. At the top of the stairs Hermione and Neville caught up to her. They launched themselves into a happy discussion of what might have happened to the Wealseys, while Alya remained silent and completely ignored

They didn't get to see Ron for most of the day as neither Ron or Ginny came to their classes. At lunchtime Hermione and Neville grabbed a few pieces of bread at the Great Hall and raced up to the Gryffindor Tower. Alya who was strangely silent for most of the day wordlessly followed them.

The three of them entered the room immediately spotting the two Weasley's, as they were the only people in the Common Room. Ginny was curled up in a small ball on my of the armchairs in front of the fireplace, crying audibly. Ron was further back leaning against the wall staring absentmindedly into space his eyes red but dry.

'What happened?' Hermione asked

Ron muttered something to himself and threw an official looking document at her. Somehow it landed at Alya's feet, she picked it up and handed it over to Neville, who carefully unfolded it. The letter itself was written on a stiff, heavy, blinding white parchment with shiny black ink.

'Dear Mr. And Ms. Weasley,

We regret to inform you that Mr. Percival Weasley is deceased as of from the 10th of January.

He was last seen attacking Ministlry Auror, the Auror in question felt he needed to defend himself. There was a duel and eventually the killing curse was cast.

We deeply mourn for your loss,

Aaron Broonyl

Magical Relations Department'

Neville read out cringing. Hermione said loudly

‘Snobs, stuck- up snobs, that’s all they ever were. They are “deeply mourning”! They could have as well written “Sorry for any inconvenience” ! Stupid heartless gits!’

Neville hugged Ginny, but she turned away from him, he whispered ‘ I am sorry love, I am so sorry.’

‘They found the Dark Mark on his arm.’ Ron said slowly shaking his head

Hermione swore, she also hugged Ron hoping to comfort him and calm herself down at the same time.

‘Don’t worry it will be all right.’ She stated

‘No it won’t, dad lost his job in the Ministry because of all this.’ Ginny said still whimpering.

No one in the room had anything to say, Alya especially felt like an outsider. She merely looked as they were calming each other in their strange ways. There was silence only a cracking of the wood in the fire could be heard, Ron, Ginny, Neville and Hermione were sitting piecefully. Alya smiled weakly, this matter should take care of itself, she left running to her next lesson. She arrived to Transfiguration just in time, to avoid any questions. The lesson passed quickly, Professor McGonagall didn’t mention anybody’s absence during class, she did however look surprised to see the Malfoy there. Alya shrugged at the fact that Draco and his gang managed to also avoid classes or the whole day.

‘Hey, where is Ron and Hermione?’ Dean asked after the bell rang

Alya paused for a moment before answering ‘In the Common Room I think.’

'Is it bad?' Lavender said. She really wanted to know every piece of gossip that went around, but with Hogwarts being so isolated there was often not enough to satisfy her.

'It's Percy.' Alya started

Seamus' eyes went wide 'He isn't dead is he?'

Slowly Alya nodded. The other Griffondor's paled and lowered their heads, everyone of them knew Percy and they were perfectly aware how close the Weasley family was to each other.

'What happened?' asked Palvati

'I am not sure if I shuld tell you, I should really leave it for Ron and Ginny to decide what to say to people.' Alya stated, how would they react to the news that Percy was a Death Eater?

Most of the Gryffindors and many Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws almost ran to the Griffondor Tower. Together they entered the Common Room and began comforting the Weasleys. Alya however again choose to stay away, after all it was not her business to get involved into things like this. Somehow she felt Ron wouldn't want a Death Eater helping him at the moment.

She turned around strolling the were nearly empty, most students and teachers went down to dinner or up to their rooms, only an occasional ghost passed by. Alya sat down in the middle of the passage way checking her homework diary, the way plenty of homework to do. She made up her mind and marched up to the library. Looking through the shelves she found a few books that she needed for her History of Magic essay, setting down at one of the tables she relaxed. Not even Draco would risk the wrath of the librarian by annoying any other student there, Alya felt she was pretty safe. She sat in the library not particulary caring as the sky grew dark and several chatty first year Hufflepufffs filled the tables around her.

She looked up to the window, it became to snow. She remembered the last time she had seen snow falling. It was with Harry, they went riding on their brooms laughing not feeling the freezing cold. Her

conscience was acting strange, slowly she began again to feel guilty at her words and it was after she had forgotten about him for almost the whole day. How frustrating. Yet she wanted to be back at the Riddle House, in his lap discussing every little thing they could think of. She snapped out of her grim thoughts as she heard two people enter the library and sit down next to her. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Neville and Ginny holding hands.

‘Are you aokay?’ Ginny asked.

‘Not sure actually, you?’ Alya replied.

Both Ginny and Neville gave her a sympathetic smile, Ginny said ‘We’ll be all right, I am sure Dumbledore won’t let us perish. I just want you to know we don’t blame you for anything, not even Ron.’

‘Thanks, I needed that.’ Alya said ‘Sorry I told the guys what happened.’

‘No worries. It was actually fun to see Ron struggling not to show off in front of so many people.’ Neville added

‘So tell me what’s the official story?’ Alya asked. ‘We don’t want too many alternative stories flying around, do we?’

Ginny replied ‘We said that Percy was on holidays there, when he saw the attack on the school he ran to help. He was dressed in a black robe so the Auror assumed he was a Death Eater and attacked him. What an unfourtunate accident.’

‘Interesting story, so much more interesting then anything I would have come up with.’ Alya said dryly. ‘Did everyone believe it?’

‘Yes surprisingly they did, but then Hogwarts was always easily convinced of things. Although I still hate lying.’ Neville stated.

‘Sometimes a lie is a lot easier to tell then the truth.’ Alya replied shutting her books. ‘And sometimes a lie is a lot easier to accept.’

‘Are you talking about Draco by any chance?’ Ginny asked cautiously

Alya smirked 'Perhaps I am, perhaps I am not.'

'This morning, what were you two talking about?' Neville said.

'Um, nothing particularly interesting.' Alya replied 'It's just something between the two of us.'

'Come on, we are friends we are supposed to tell each other all of our problems.' Ginny urged 'And whatever it was, it was not pleasant. We all saw the look on your face.'

'Alright then if you truly want to hear it.' Alya shrugged. Fine, just don't be completely disgusted, just because I am telling the truth. 'But first did they say where your brother was killed?'

'Durmstrang' Ginny said 'What does it have to do with anything.'

Alya let out a relieved breath. 'I saw an Auror killing a Death Eater, I thought it might have been Percy, that's all. It wasn't him, I was at Beauxbatons at the time of the attack.'

'What you mean you were there when the other schools were attacked!' Neville exclaimed.

'Shh, quieter, someone might hear you.' Ginny said

'Yes I was there, all the new recruits were to come and have some fun. Most did just that, especially Draco and his cronies.' Alya explained. 'Did you read the newspaper reports on the attacks?'

'Yes, but that's just rubbish. Right?' Ginny asked, half pleaded, the article described what happened in quite a lot of detail, it sounded horrible. But seeing it, that must have been a lot worse.

'No, the Daily Prophet was accurate about the attacks, especially the one in France.' Alya stated, she made a disgusted face as she thought about what happened.' Look I think about half of the girls were raped before they were killed, I really don't want to describe it.'

'Is that what made you so angry? The raping?' Neville inquired.

'Well it was part of it. Lucius promised Draco the world, as long as he becomes Voldemort's second in command. ' Alya stated in a cold voice, admitting

'Draco? Mini –you-know-who?' Ginny questions hesitantly.

'He is like his father; even I don't know what he will or will not do to get what he wants.' Alya replied grimly.

'Is there any way we can help you stop him?' asked Neville with a pityful look on his face.

'No, this is not your battle to fight, but others and mine if I'll ever gather the courage.'

## Chapter 19 – Of truth and art

Christmas day evening was calm in the Gryffindor Tower, most of the House left the previous morning after a rather humble End of Term feast. Ron and Hermione had agreed not to open their presents after dinner, which they had just returned from. They impatiently searched underneath the Christmas tree for presents, only one person joined them and she wasn't exactly welcome.

'What, you didn't have time to collect your piles of presents before? Must you invade our time now?' Ron asked, he unwrapped the traditional sweater as always in maroon.

Alya picked up the little box addressed to her, she carefully opened it afraid of jinxes or spell possibly cast on it. She looked at the minuscule bottle of black liquid, there were only a few potions of that shade all of them dangerously lethal. On the bottom was a cheerful note:

'I think you know what it is, use it. It will make everyone in this world much happier.  
Draco'

Alya laughed bitterly noting to applaud Draco on his sense of humour later. She finally decided to answer Ron's prying question.

'No, I didn't have time to collect my little poisonous present before; I had to serve detention because you messed up my charms project last week. Also as you can see, my family wasn't kind enough to send me the most hideous clothes in the world; I suppose it's the best you can afford. I would have expected it would be better now that one of you is dead.' Alya wondered at her sanity, she already knew Ron would explode her taunting sounded something Draco usually said. Ron dropped the sweater and mismatching orange socks (gift from George) and snapped back:

'You wouldn't understand what family love is.'

'Too right I wouldn't and you are not helping me deal with it.' Alya retorted, she turned her back to him and began leaving. Hermione kicked Ron on the foot and said

'Apologise to her, Christmas is family time; remember how hard it was for Harry?' Ron grumpily followed Alya; he found her sleeve and tugged. The material cleanly split in two. She attempted to hide the mark only to draw more attention to the blackness of her skin. Ron recognised it immediately.

'You were lying to us all this time! Traitor!' He yelled, he retreated searching for a wand in his back pocket. Hermione joined Ron's side while Alya didn't hesitate with her answer.

'Here you go, yes, it's true. What are you going to do, kill me? Or maybe send me to Azkaban!' Alya shouted ripping off the rest of her already torn sleeve. She paused, ripped off the other and threw them both at Ron. On one arm was the Dark Mark now plain for everyone to see, on the other shone an ugly burn scar. Ron and Hermione raised their wands staring at Alya with revulsion.

She looked at her attackers and then to the tattoo, slowly she sank to the floor. Alya no longer cared if she was a Malfoy or a Gryffindor, she forgot she was nearly an adult and began crying.

Ron took a look at her and disappeared to his room, Hermione was confused by Alya's tear rolling down her cheeks. She wasn't crying like a teenager who just failed another's trust. She wasn't like the actresses in old movies that Hermione remembered or like a child. Alya didn't make a sound; she was like no person and like all of them at the same time. A broken human weeping without hope.

Hermione moved to help Alya, but stopped in mid track. This was a Death Eater in front of her; they deserved neither pity nor compassion, as they gave none. They tortured and killed without mercy, Death Eater should not receive any kindness for their sins. Sticking her nose high in the air Hermione turned away and ran up the stairs to join Ron.

They didn't call a teacher; it never even crossed their mind. The next morning Hermione woke up from the cold breeze in the room. She



had fallen asleep cuddled up with Ron in his bed. Hermione climbed out with great care to allow Ron a few more ours of sleep. In the common room she saw Alya in the exact same spot where they left her the previous night. As Hermione crossed the room and sat in an armchair, Alya shifted slightly to hide her face.

‘What are you trying to do, make us forgive you? That’s never going to happen.’ Hermione boasted. No reply came so she continued taunting the other girl. She didn’t know why, but it felt good. Finally she said:

‘You are a Death Eater, you don’t deserve to live, let alone come to Hogwarts.’

Alya’s head shot up, she was angrier than she ever remembered being in her life. She felt like smothering Hermione, wiping the Mudblood’s face in dirt.’ Do you think I became a Death Eater by choice!!!’

Hermione had to wonder how much control Alya had over her powers the shout alone shook the whole Tower.

‘DO YOU THINK I CHOSE TO COME TO HOGWARTS!’ Alya continue roaring, anger once unleashed didn’t falter in its power ‘DO YOU THINK CHOSE THIS KIND OF LIFE?!’

Alya’s voice shook on the last line and the glass someone left on the table exploded breaking into thousands of shards and flying off in every direction. Hermione jumped in her seat passionately grateful the glass missed her.

‘I – I, don’t know, if you didn’t, who made you?’ Hermione stuttered.

‘Lucius’ Alya spat out, now that she managed to make something explode she felt calmer by far.

‘What about your parents?’ Hermione asked, she had once tried to approach the subject, but Alya immediately put a stop to it.

‘What about them?’ Alya grimaced. Hermione rolled her eyes:

‘What happened to them?’

‘My father is in prison, probably not going to get out any time soon.’ Alya shrugged. ‘I used to live with him until the Aurors came.’

‘But, Azbakan, why?’ Hermione asked wildly. She no longer cared for the supposed creature of evil in front of her; Alya didn’t seem particularly dark anyway. Was her dad Muggle? No, he was a Malfoy, a pure blood then.

‘Azbakan is not the only jail, we used to live in Orleans so he was taken to a French Prison for being a Death Eater in the first war.’ Alya explained. She pulled her-self up, it was cold and the floor was uncomfortable, she couldn’t believe she fell asleep on it, let alone on the patch without carpet.

‘That would explain your accent. Did you go to Beauxbatons then?’ Hermione nodded. France, she loved everything about it and wanted to learn more, this was her chance.

‘No, I was home schooled until I came to Hogwarts. Father always thought it was better and safer for me. He was a cold man, but at least he cared about me.’ Alya sighed; she still missed the old castle she grew up in.

How did you end up in Hogwarts in that case?’ Hermione asked evidently disappointed.

‘After he was taken, I was sent to my nearest relations, Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy. Lucius persuaded Dumbledore to let me come to Hogwarts and he decided to allow me to come, here I am now. Alya mumbled.

‘And you mum?’ Hermione asked, she really didn’t want to know what it was like living in the Malfoy Manor.

‘Dead. ‘ The other girl groaned looking at Hermione’s dazed face; she went on. ‘ My father hosted a party for his ex-Death Eater friends, he passed out eventually, but his drunk mates carried on. My mum told

them they should stop drinking and they didn't like it. They beat her up, raped her, put her in a big bag and threw her into our pool. After they finished on her they began playing with me, a couple of Cruciatus curses, one of them attempted to toss me into the fireplace. His aim wasn't great, he was drunk and all, but I hit a metal bar with my hand.' Alya said flatly staring at her burn mark.

Hermione gaped, how could anyone talk so flatly about something as violent and disturbing. Now she could see how a hot bar could have cut into a child's soft flesh.

'I was four then. My father vowed never to have anything to do with Death Eaters, Dark Lords or the Malfoys again. The two of us moved out of Britain and he made me promise I would never become a Death Eater like him.' Alya finished shutting her eyes in shame. Hermione was in awe, there was so much pain on Alya's face. Granger felt like crying, now she really understood the whole story.

Alya smiled to her-self a little, there she was telling her deepest secrets to person she hardly knew. Strangely her mind didn't protest, her mouth her mouth didn't refuse to open in attempt to stop talking, she gave up thinking long ago.

'Maybe you should spy on You-know-who.' Hermione jumped at the idea.

'I have thought about it already, but I can't, I am just not brave enough.' Alya replied 'You know I shouldn't be at Hogwarts, I shouldn't be a Gryffindor.'

'Why did the Hat put you into Gryffindor then? You are already brave, you have managed to live through everything else in your life...' Hermione started, but was cut off by the other girl.

'Survival and bravery have nothing to do with each other. The Sorting Hat told me I couldn't be a Ravenclaw because I am not smart enough, Hufflepuff is out of question, loyalty is not my best quality by far, Slytherin couldn't happen, I dislike both the Dark Lord and the shade of green they use of their coat of arms. Gryffindor didn't suit me either, I'll run away from my problems rather than face them.'

‘Then why were you sorted into this house?’ Hermione asked completely puzzled. Alya smirked tiredly:

‘Only because the Hat felt my hatred for the thing on my arm was above all my other emotion.’

Hermione didn’t think it was a good enough reason to deny someone a house they belonged, but didn’t voice her opinion. What Alya told her in the past half an hour revealed more about Alya’s identity than Hermione managed to uncover in several months. Hermione needed sometime to think over the issues facing her; fortunately the blond girl let her deal with them in silence.

‘I am sorry for all the pain we have caused you, what you have to do is not any better to you than us. I’ll speak to Ron and tell him to stay away from you and be quiet about the subject.’ Hermione paused, as Alya’s face didn’t reveal the relief Hermione expected. ‘None of us will ever completely trust you, but I am prepared to let you live. You are a decent human being beneath the idiotic, rude Malfoy façade.’

Alya muttered something in gratitude and rested her head; there was nothing else really to say. She was enjoying the moment of peace that would finish the instant Ron awoke.

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Arhimar was far from enjoying his wanderings around the manor, he had just tortured some girl for no reason. He had raped her; broke her bones, cut into her skin, and even smothered her for a while. She eventually died of blood loss and he felt nothing for his work, not a single moment of pleasure. He could have stayed and tormented the family, but the death of every mudblood in the world wouldn’t matter to him. Only one death could make a difference – the one who ripped his heart and shredded it. She had to pay for his misery.

He brainstormed a few ideas on how to get to her when he noticed a door being ajar. Whenever he walked past it before it was locked, never once did Tom reveal what lay behind it. Arhimar entered quietly, he found the room stunk of turps and oil.

Around the walls rested huge canvases, some finished, but most not. He found a portrait of him-self in his Hogwarts uniform and young Tom in his magnificent Slytherin robes. The biggest canvas was of the Slytherin manor in the snow just barely started, but Arhimar could see two tiny figures standing between the trees. So Riddle had seen them together.

In the middle of the room, propped against a chair was what looked like a vision of a fight between Draco and Harry during the fourth year. It was a memory Tom had gotten hold off during one of their lessons, but radically different. Harry and Draco were alone not surrounded by others; they were equal in height and wore the same robes. At the bottom in pencil was scribbled 'The Choice.'

He continued investigating nearly jumping backwards at the sight of the artist's image of the devil. The vibrant, fiery colours mixed with black creating an aura of reality that was frightening. Arhimar turned away and observed the open paint tubes scattered on the floor, it was now obvious where Tom spent all his time. In his studio, painting.

Arhimar picked up an oily brush; his fingers met the blue paint on the handle. He dropped it and looked for a towel, his gaze fell on a half finished portrait of an auburn haired girl. Her clothing belonged to an earlier part of the century; in the background were thick flowering rose bushes.

'I see you like Katrina.' Riddle said coming in, he carried a few tubes with paint. Arhimar was relieved Tom was smiling; he was in enough trouble already. 'As you can see painting is a passion of mine. Always was, art got me through childhood and my Hogwarts education, even if my only tool was a lead pencil. These days I can afford a bit more. Did you see the one of you, Harry?'

He sat down the tubes and continued painting. Completely amazed Harry watched the flat surface become a three-dimensional bush of roses. He breathlessly replied:

'Yes, I saw it, but why do you have one of Draco and I, There are plenty of other memories you could have illustrated. '

'I began the painting long before I learned of your memory; it is simply a representational image of a crook in the path that I could have taken. Really, for many years I thought he would be my heir. I gave up my quest for immortality and I needed a successor about your age. Draco was the obvious choice, Lucius was one of my first allies and neither Crabbe's or Goyle's sons were smart enough for the role. Draco is very jealous of you now. I'm afraid one of you will die in the war or immediately after.'

Harry's anger boiled, he couldn't believe what he was hearing. 'You can't deny me my place!'

'I am not, I am merely telling you that I had to make a decision between the two of you and he is not happy. Be careful, Harry, he will try other ways before he challenges you openly. Or already did.' Tom sighed; Harry wasn't listening to his advice. The boy was staring at the paintings instead, from where Voldemort sat Harry seemed almost arrogant. What had happened, Harry was never arrogant, the one trait Tom horribly disliked in Draco. Strange, this wasn't meant to happen. Tom rested his hand on the edge of the canvas.

'Are you ready to talk? It has been a month and I have no explanation from you still.' Tom said. Arhimar shorted, the old man just didn't get it.

'What happened is not your business I have told you already, many times. It has been a month and I am still supposedly grounded, it hasn't helped either of us one bit. Instead tell me about the girl you are so carefully painting and don't argue with me again.' He retorted.

'Katrina?' Riddle glanced at the painting; he put the caps on the tubes and turned to Harry. 'The first time I saw her was when I returned to the Orphanage for the summer holidays after my fifth year. I was sitting in a tree to avoid bullies near the village cemetery when she ran past me with her wild girlfriends. The two girls I knew, the village was a small place I knew pretty much everyone, but Katrina I've never seen. She lived in York with her mother who had taken ill; her father had died so she moved in with her aunt in the village.'

Her aunt was a devilish woman; she looked like the scariest hag you've ever imagined and was deeply into the Church. Of me she thought as a little demon. In my youth it was uncommon for me to do strange things with spontaneous magic and being a bastard in her eyes already condemned me to the deepest pits of hell. She wouldn't let me come near her house, once she threatened to call the police when she caught me watching Katrina put out the washing. Desperate for love I left for Hogwarts and returned a year later no less in love.

I found a time when the Hag went to the markets and couldn't watch over her niece. I spoke to Katrina for the first time and fell deeper to her spells. We began to sneak off to the cemetery in the depths of the night. You've been to the place; it has a magic of its own. After two weeks I promised I would finish Hogwarts then return and marry her. I had even told her who my father was, a secret I had kept from everyone. I revealed I was a wizard; she didn't seem to mind. Her aunt never found us, no one knew at all so this time I returned to school in far better spirits.

I left my dark arts studies for a while in favour of writing long love poems to her. I couldn't spend a minute without thinking about her; we continue writing to each other until February when she begged me to stop. claiming her aunt was suspicious. I complied and impatiently waited for the end of the school year. When I graduated and came back to Little Hangleton, as soon as I got off the train I raced to Katrina's house. I found she was gone.

The aunt threw me out of-course; she didn't want anything to do with me. It was the keeper of the local bar that finally offered me information. Tho weeks after she told me to shut up she ran off with some guy she met during her Christmas trip to London. Her mother finally died and he was there to comfort her. Katrina immediately warmed up to him and forgot all about me.

I was furious then, I smashed half the chairs and overturned the tables until I was seised from the back and dragged outside. It took a day or two to recover from the initial shock and after that I left the blasted village. I only returned twice, once to kill my dear family and before my return. This time was when I dedicated my-self to the Dark

Arts; I studied with Grindelwald and other countless dark wizards. I learned, I guessed, I invented. When I started gathering my supporters I fancied to find Katrina. She matured as I have, but grew no less beautiful. At first I asked her to return, but it was a lost hope she was happily married with two children and was expecting a third soon. She refused, so I took my revenge.

Her husband went first, I don't know his name but he went down quietly. Didn't scream like most, I think he was a honourable man who just happened to mess with the wrong girl, he would have made a good friend. The kids were a pity too, sweet things looked just like Katrina. After I hung their corpses on the front porch she really began to loath me. She did love me once, but no mother could love the murderer of her children.

I offered her a chance of marriage again; she obviously threw the idea back in my face. I pointed the wand right at her heart and looked into her eyes, I couldn't kill her. The only person in the world who had ever loved me, I couldn't kill her so I left her lying there, but I continued watching her. Death Eaters followed her day and night, I sometimes observed too.

The third child was born a few months later, a black haired boy. She spitefully called him Tom, he was healthy enough and he was a wizard. One day he apparated out of his cradle when Katrina forgot to feed him for too long. She was messed up, depressed, forgetful, afraid of loud noises and angry.

One night in late July little Tom continued crying again, she didn't change his nappy. His crying sent her into hysterics; Katrina couldn't bear it. She had avoided touching the baby for days, he wouldn't stop crying to matter how hard she screamed at him.

She grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed him in the chest. I remember it like yesterday; I was watching her that night under my invisibility cloak in the branches of a tree outside her windows. She yelled out my name, her children and her mother's. But mine was so often, every time the knife went through the poor baby's body. She thought it was me she was killing.



In the end I couldn't help my-self; I came to stop her. My dear Katrina, she was covered in blood with absolute madness in her eyes, her once clear, sweet eyes. I stood still calling her name and she pointed the knife at her chest, she wouldn't listen to me to her I was dead. Later I walked away my hands clean and her body floating in a pool of her own blood.'

Harry stared at the picture; nothing suggested Katrina's demise was so violent. He never wondered about Tom's life between Hogwarts and his assault on the Magical World. Love was the last thing he expected, but he was curious. 'Why did you go to find her again?'

'I wanted my revenge for what she did to me. I was a fool, it was better to have her happy with her new husband then deny her all chance of a future. All of us had our hearts broken sometime in our life's, people get over it. But I was so selfish, every day of my life since then I've regretted my choice to invade her life. Had I truly loved her I would have let her be.' Tom paused his eyes were glittery, he didn't want to sound like he was preaching but he had to say it.

'I know there is a girl involved with you and she hurt you whether intentionally or no. Please don't repeat the mistake I did. Think about something else, leave her be. Eventually both of you will grow to be happy again. I took revenge and I felt no better for it, not when I saw Katrina murder her own son, nor when I killed my own father.'

Harry shook his head. 'All right, I won't go after her, your story is too nasty.'

'We better take another look at that gun.'

## Chapter 20

Much of the rest of the term passed without major incident, the Dark lord seemed less hurried or worried about the outcome of the War and the death rates dropped a little. Easter holidays at Hogwarts were quiet, more peaceful, not as frightened as during the Christmas season.

Dumbledore however retreated from the school life completely; no student had seen him for more than a month. The other teachers provided no explanation, as they didn't quite understand the headmaster's malady themselves. Albus kindly left Snape and McGonagall in charge of the affairs of the school. Out of sheer boredom McGonagall became convinced that Dumbledore had been wrong on some of his decisions. The man wasted no time on cancelling all Quidditch matches and Hogsmeade trips. But McGonagall now found there was nothing fun about the school at all, so she arranged for the Hogsmeade trips to be re-instated as well as Quidditch.

Alya was now getting ready to leave, her homework was finished last night and she had saved a few galleons from her bank account before Lucius emptied it for his own new wardrobe. Some of the students have already left, Alya only had to pick up her cloak from the Tower. She entered the empty dormitory meeting face to face with a gloomy barn owl. It dropped a black envelope into Alya's hands. She ignored the foreboding feeling and quickly ripped it open.

She recognised Draco's firm, italic print immediately, even his handwriting portrayed his arrogance. The paper too was especially made for the Malfoy family; Alya clearly felt its greasy texture. The letter itself was short it said:

'Either stay in the castle or be a good girl and do your lord's will.'

Alya mumbled several swear words under her breath and threw the letter under her pillow. Perhaps some house-elf would find it, realise what it was about and alert somebody. Alya didn't dare to hope in such luck or the intelligence of house-elves instead she concentrated

on shooing out the owl. Already it had pooped on Parvati's bed, Alya was sure it would go for her things next.

Finally getting the owl out of the room Alya rummaged through the piles of clothes left around, her cloak ended up on the very bottom. How did it happen she wasn't certain, she wore it the previous night. Alya left the tower and sprinted to catch up to Ron and Hermione or at least Neville and Ginny. She saw their backs from the top of the Marble Stairs just four they walked past the Entrance Doors. Filch was out, handing detentions for running and shouting, Alya already had more than a month's worth for some cause or other she wasn't in the mood for more. Alya kept her head low and shuffled slowly behind some Hufflepuffs.

By the time Alya was at the Front Steps the other Gryffindors almost disappeared from view. She had to dash if she was to reach them before Hogsmeade.

'Hey! Wait!' she shouted, panting heavily. Ginny turned making the other three stop as well. Alya wanted to kiss the Weasley forgetting on how many levels it would be wrong.

'Anything we can help you with?' Neville asked. Alya was about to burst out all they needed to know, when she felt a subconscious jab into her back. Alya could almost feel it cutting through her skin and bone. For more than a minute Alya stood open mouthed seemingly frozen, at last she said:

'Um, can you get me a dozen sugar quills? I'll pay you tonight.' The others swapped side-glances sceptically. Hermione highly doubted the Malfoy was after snacks.

'Surely you can go and get them yourself; the village is only 500 metres away. Unless there is something else?'

Alya blushed 'I have some homework to do, so I have to run back right now. It's been nice knowing you.'

She turned on her heel and marched back to the castle hating herself. Damn them all! She thought as Filch gave her another detention

for bringing dirt into the castle. His smirk was pure wicked, Alya made up her mind while he was still telling her about the capital punishment he wanted to use on her. With a straight face she said:

‘Mrs Norris will die by the end of the week.’

The simple statement shut up the caretaker with ease. The Malfoy wished some Gryffindors were there to see it, talking back to Filch was a thing to be proud of among the Gryffindors. Most of the House however had left to go to Hogsmeade and the little first and second years were too afraid of her to be of any help. Alya knew one other person who could be of help.

The walk to McGonagall’s office took far too long, Alya had never been inside the office previously, but knew it was near the Transfiguration classroom. Still there was a problem, Alya barely remembered the way there and the moving walls didn’t help. She was panting when she finally found the right door.

Alya knocked and swallowed hard. A short yes followed as the Malfoy entered. McGonagall definitely looked surprised.

‘Ms. Malfoy, what great event has occurred to bring you here this previously fine morning?’ the professor asked sarcastically. Alya noted the dark eye bags underneath the teacher’s eyes, but paid no heed to them.

‘We need to raise the alarm, many students will die tonight if we don’t help them.’ Alya replied again trying to keep her voice factual. McGonagall’s lips tightened:

‘Please, this is not the time for stupid pranks by Death Eaters. I have papers to mark and I have organised an outing for the school either use the opportunity or stay out of the way and study.’

‘But Professor! The attack, people will die.’ Alya argued.

‘Death? You know nothing about death; you are just an arrogant child like all others in your family, think you are above all else. Yes, an attack! There are attacks each day; no doubt you participate in them

too. Why don't you tell me the time and place so I can send the handful of Aurors we still have alive to die.' McGonagall returned, Alya could understand the bitterness, but it still hurt. It hurt every time.

'Believe me, I am only trying to help. The attack is... it will be near Hogwarts, time...' Alya trailed off paralysed with fear. Her dark mark was burning; it was like the Dark Lords would know she was betraying them. She was petrified.

'Stop carrying on with this rubbish! GET OUT!' McGonagall shouted finally losing it. Alya's eyes glittered; she let the professor have her way. McGonagall would pay later. She left the office only to bang into Snape.

'Malfoy, still wailing about your lost love?' he asked sternly 'Wait here.'

He walked inside carrying a few flasks with him. From behind the thin door Alya heard the muffled conversation. Snape placed the potions on the table slightly banging his knee.

'Here are a few more that you asked for. I am not sure what you intend to do there for, there border on dark magic.' Snape stated, McGonagall grunted:

'We have already tried other things, Severus. There is no other way, but this. If there is one at all. I don't think...'

'Shh, he'll be fine, don't worry.'

Snape's footsteps were heard, and then he opened the door. Alya was about to ask whom they were talking about, but Snape's dark glare stopped that thought immediately. The potions master grabbed her robe and sat her in the empty Transfiguration classroom next door. He paced the room for a while before saying:

'You were telling her about the attack? Stupid girl, she is on the edge of her sanity and she thinks you are a death eater, which you are of course, but that's the least of our problems. Minerva probably thinks you are setting a trap for the Aurors and even if she was sure there

definitely would be an attack, she is powerless. The ruins of the Ministry listen to Dumbledore, not her. The order is broken, she is left alone.'

Alya stared first at Snape then at the worn out carpet. 'But people will die, we need to do something, so many have died already.' She argued.

'What needs to be done and what will be done are two completely different things.'

Alya paled 'What are you saying?'

'Go to your room, read a book and pretend you know nothing about the disaster that will happen in an hour or so. And for your sake, don't feel too guilty. It's simply a fact of life, people die.'

Time froze as the first three blasts resonated through everyone's ears. Dust and rubble filled the air, wisps of fire engulfed the blown-up buildings. Time froze as robed figures emerged out of the smoke. To Ron it seemed there must have been hundreds of them, far too many to count. A dozen more blasts as buildings turned to rubble and humans to singed, unrecognisable body parts. Ron's eyes grew wide, his ears noted the terrified screams and he raised his wand in defence.

'Look out for the Malfoys, I will finish all three of them off on my own hands if they dare to touch any one of us.' He said to Hermione. Ginny and Neville wondered off by themselves, but Ron didn't even want to ponder on their fates at the moment. With the biggest, loudest boom that demolished Honeydukes time returned to its usual speed.

Hermione grabbed Ron's left hand and muttered 'I love you.'

He nodded and raced towards the oncoming Death Eaters. Ron's cry of 'Glory to Gryffindor!' started the fight. Death eaters armed with the most dangerous curses known to the magic world didn't care for the pain they wrought. They separated into small units of three or four and concentrated on a few people at a time. Their tactics had no fault; someone was always there to defend while others attacked, the

dark side had a definite advantage to the panicking villagers of Hogsmeade.

‘Impedimenta! Stupefy! Expeliamus! Flipendo! Accio boulder!’ Hermione shouted fast ever changing the direction of her wand. Death Eaters ducked or blocked as necessary. ‘Impedimenta!!!’

Avery fell, Ginny came up beside Hermione with her wand out and firing. The Death Eaters separated in the small avenues of the village sneaking up on the students and residents. Many ran for the buildings, but Hermione quickly recognised the things Death Eaters used to blow houses as grenades, simple muggle grenades. She could just imagine Death Eaters stealing them off some army base in the middle of the night.

‘Ron! RUN, ITS ABOUT TO EXPLODE!’ Hermione yelled ducking for cover. Ron and Ginny responded, the Death Eater still held it in his hands as it blew taking his with the other ten or so people in the vicinity. A shard launched it-self deep into Ginny’s arm and several more into Dean’s skull. Within seconds his face was covered in blood seeping into the rocks around him. Ron watched horrified as his friend closed his eyes and let out a shallow breath.

Hermione threw another spell at another attacker; to count them would have been in vain. She noticed the most obvious thing. ‘Where is Neville?!’

‘I don’t know.’ Ginny muttered, Hermione didn’t hear but was too busy to press the matter further. Ron tore him-self away praying inwardly that Dean was just unconscious and could be revived, he didn’t dare to hope for much though. The Gryffindors now saw the next step in the Dark Lord’s plan, black steel tubes in Death Eaters’ hands. Hermione recognised them immediately and proceeded to duck behind a stone pillar of the potions shop.

Lavender saw the red of their Gryffindor robes from across the street; she put a protective shield around her and raced across to the others. Her robes billowed in the by-product wind from the spells and blasts; she waved her wand madly. There was never a moment of doubt on her face, two bullets came from her left then another four from the

right. Hermione sighed in resignation, the shield protected only from magic.

Ginny whimpered hanging on to her brother who was doing his best with her arm. He was now deeply grateful of Hermione's forced tutoring in healing charms.

Neville ran for cover inside a shabby second hand bookshop. The main battle might have been over, but the Death Eaters were scattered around the small alleyways, not yet broken down enough to flee. Some of them wandered the area looking for victims to kill. Neville wondered where the Aurors were, some off-duty ones who were already in the village led the opposition, but the Ministry brought no aid.

He held his breath as a pair of masked wizards walked past the window of his hiding place. As soon as Neville thought it was safe again he crept further back into the basement whose door was luckily ajar, he pushed it wide open and entered. The room acted as a storeroom for the shop, it was cold and dusty; Neville faintly saw the outlines of web-covered books stacked in huge piles to the ceiling.

He stepped backwards and tripped over a scattered magazine. He landed hard shaking the piles of tomes around him; they swayed from side to side threatening to drop on top of him. Neville didn't falter, to go forwards would have meant crawling headlong into the stairs, the sides were taken up by books, he moved back and shielded his head from the impact.

Books around him collapsed by mere chance the main flow missed Neville although he wasn't lucky enough to be spared entirely. He picked his way against the back wall sheltering behind the few stacks that remained intact. Neville urged him-self to camouflage with the wall.

The noise travelled outside through the open door and onto the street. In the silence that now swept the village the echoes were not missed. A Death Eater turned to the shop, he wondered if the owner was still inside. Many were bound to have hidden in their houses. He stepped through the door and inspected the inside of the shop.



Row after row of shelves, he peered behind each one, then under the counter. The Death Eater found nothing until a small door caught his eye. Dust rose through the doorway leading towards darkness. He carefully approached it and felt for any light switches. He glided down the stairs and lit his wand staring inspecting the room. He was met a library worth of books jumbled on the wooden floor.

The Death Eater took off his mask for better vision; it was obvious the owners preferred to avoid the room and someone had recently disturbed it. By all chances that person was probably still in there.

Neville gasped, the figure was unhooded. The Death Eater could almost see him now, just a little to the left and Neville would be right in front of him. The Gryffindor squashed further, his hand brushed slightly against the wall. The Death Eater turned and Neville's heart leaped out of his place. He dared not believe his eyes.

The Death Eater moved closer, Neville was about to call out, but Lucius Malfoy appeared half way down the stairs. His hair was fluorescent in the shadows streams of blood seeped down it. There was a dark bruise on the right side of his face

'My lord.' He bowed shuffling his robes against his body. 'The others are retreating, we must leave.'

The other Death Eater nodded and followed Lucius out. Neville adjusted himself to lean against the wall. His breathing was shallow and stuttered as the adrenaline rush took its toll. Neville never did use that wand he had in the ready; instead he hid in the gloom like a sick rat about to die. He stood up fully ashamed of his-self, other student like Hermione or Ron were sure to have had their pick at the enemy.

Neville wondered if Ginny was safe, they became separated shortly after the chaos broke out. He wasn't even sure where, but his doubts and fears dissolved. He had witnessed a supposed miracle. It never crossed his mind to think about the cold eyes that almost found him or Lucius sudden apparition into the scene.

A few minutes passed before Neville moved again, he on his way kicked the books happily and walked out onto the street. He was met by silence and rubble that remained. At the top of the street he still found no one. He turned a corner, walked down another street only hearing his quiet footsteps, he continued on. The destruction grew as he neared the main street and some voices shouted in the distance.

Dozens of people milled about; some kind of a makeshift hospital was set up in aged, rough tents. Neville saw Ginny coming inside the tent; she flipped up the curtain and disappeared within. Neville ran after her bumping into several people, which earned him many annoyed looks. He barely reached the entrance when Ginny emerged again. She marched out quickly and collided straight into him.

She drew her wand in habit and Neville raised his hands, after a second they both burst out laughing. Neville hugged her and whispered:

‘Ginny, you won’t believe whom I’ve seen. Sit down.’ He led her to the porch of the Three Broomsticks. ‘We are going to survive this war! You see I was hiding in this shop and a person walked in, I thought it was a Death Eater and nearly died of fright. But he takes off his mask and guess who it is! Harry!’

Ginny found no words to say; instead she tightly gripped Neville and laughed with him with immense relief. She urged him to come and find Ron and Hermione who ended up just on the other side of the street. Ginny ran to her brother shouting:

‘Ron, Harry! Neville saw Harry! He was here!’

Ron’s and Hermione’s eyes lit up, they immediately begged for the details which Neville was happy to provide. Ron called Harry many names at that point for letting them down for so long and just to let his emotions out. Hermione shook his head, grabbed Neville and raced into the tents.

The stench of blood made Neville want to be sick. Some many people lay in the beds with only a few healers walking around helping them. At one side bodies were just piled up one on top of another,

Neville was afraid to count. But Hermione was oblivious to the bloody scene stretched out before her. She walked through the thin pathway heading towards her goal, she just found the person she wanted:

‘Professor McGonagall!’ The Transfiguration teacher turned and Hermione shouted further, ‘Miss, we saw Harry just now.’

Hermione launched into a long description of Neville’s earlier adventure. He was left to stand by the side meekly nodding his head every few words. McGonagall’s gaze saddened as Hermione finished the tale. A passing by healer said a few words in McGonagall’s ear. She replied quietly enough for the Gryffindors not to hear, the Healer shrugged and continued making his way to his patients.

‘I don’t think anyone will benefit if we keep the facts from you much longer. Other people have recognised him also no doubt; soon news will leak. Gryffindors have always valued the truth, perhaps more than they should.’ Professor McGonagall paused, ‘We can’t talk here, come to the castle with me.’

## Chapter 21- Of Truth and Returns

Hermione unquestioningly followed her teacher and Neville lagged slightly behind, outside they picked up Ron and Ginny who were impatiently waiting at the door. The five of them were glad to leave the destruction of the village, but not so much to return to the aged towers of the school. McGonagall felt her-self slow down at the front gates. She pondered for a second on the idea of telling them just there, but open land was not the best place for secrecy. She couldn't know who or what else might be hiding around.

Minerva swung open the gate and let the students inside. They huddled together walking up the croaking stairs to Dumbledore's office. Professor McGonagall muttered the newest password, there were now changed thrice daily each stranger than previous. She led the Gryffindors in and bid them to sit.

'What I am about to tell you is very important, you are privileged to be trusted with this information. Only one or two historians know this, none in the Ministry even suspect it. The Order is the only one who properly understands the situation of this war. I will be thoughtfully displeased if anything said in this room escaped somehow.' Professor McGonagall sat down in Dumbledore's empty chair. The office was out of use, gone was Dumbledore's usual stack of paper work and books scattered on the table. The portraits slept snoring all in one time creating an uneasy wave of air falling and rising. Hermione and Ron cheerfully agreed to McGonagall's terms, they half expected news of some guerrilla army or a secret plan they weren't aware of and secret keeping was not new to them.

'The amount of public morale we will lose if this gets out will be horrendous, this was is already balancing on a fine enough line after the hideousness of today. It is already known that Potter has not been attending Hogwarts since September; it is late April now. The public are grieved enough by the disappearance of their hero and supposed saviour. No doubt when you saw him, Neville, you could only think of the happy ending that is to come. So would the rest of wizarding Britain, they do not need to know what Potter has really been getting up to in the past months.' McGonagall sighed; further lecturing on the importance of secrecy saved her explaining the

actual topic. She wondered about the best way of the facts to be concise yet mindful of the pain she was about to bring.

‘Today you saw Potter appearing as a Death Eater at your first glance. He talked to Lucius Malfoy; one of his most hated people and not attempted to attack him. This was while just less than half of You-know-who’s Death Eaters were in Hogsmeade. Perhaps the not so obvious conclusion is that Potter wasn’t fighting the Death Eaters, but rather in league with them.’

Outraged outbursts followed the remark; Ron and Hermione couldn’t even comprehend the idea of Harry on the dark side. Neville sat frozen in his seat his mind re-playing his vision of Harry. Ginny first joined her brother in argument, but soon stopped. McGonagall always insisted on truth from her students, a courtesy she returned. Ginny sunk into her chair and said:

‘Arhimar or whatever it is. That’s Harry isn’t it?’

Ron turned to her, absolutely dazed for more than a minute. McGonagall picked out a large leather bound book from inside Dumbledore’s desk draw. She let her students wallow in pity and anger as she searched for the right page. The book was a Middle-English translation of an Anglo-Saxon manuscript that now almost required a translation of its own. She comforted her-self by keeping the same tone of speech she would normally use while teaching.

‘The first thing you must realise, what occurred is not Harry’s fault. Just like You-know-who never had control over his actions, Harry is the same. No, I don’t need you trying to prove me wrong, I am not an expert at the matter, but currently I know more than you all. Firstly, we have to know that Harry is a descendant of Godric Gryffindor, not directly but the closest. You-know-who you are aware is the Heir of Slytherin. Not a big surprise I think.

The things that interest us are the accounts of a Dark Lord terrorising Britain around the time of the Founders. The story Dumbledore knows and would tell you if not for his health condition presently. It turned out eventually that this dark Lord was not other than Slytherin possessed by a demon of hell.

Godric managed to make a pact with the demon to free Salazar from its influence and instead promised a descendant from each family. But it is foolish to make deals with demons; Godric assumed that the two descendants would be in different time periods so one could fight the other. He didn't count of the lasting effects Salazar would have, it is only after that Slytherin became the man we remember today, he was forever darker and more arrogant.

The demon chose his victims well, both have strong family inheritance, both of mixed blood to increase magical power and this century was an already unsettling time. You-know-who started to succumb to the demon during his Hogwarts years, but didn't completely fall to the monster until after he left school. With Potter the process took mere couple of months. I see Hermione already mouthing "Why?" For one Sirius' death was a good deal of shock to him, two - You-know-who tried to enter his body previously and three - his own attempts at learning Occumancy further weakened the barriers of his mind.

At this point in time I don't think much of Harry is left as you knew him. The person you saw today, Neville, was not Harry but a beast sheltered underneath human skin.' Minerva shut the book with a snap; she couldn't stare at the gruesome illustration of the Dark Lord any longer. The Gryffindors has to work hard before the information could be comprehended. Ron's mind was particularly stubborn; his denial towards Harry's demise was full and unshakable.

'You must understand and not be angry with Harry. Could he think straight he would regret his actions as much as anyone else. It is a curse bestowed upon him by his ancestors, the legacy of the founders that we all must suffer at the present.' Minerva stared at Fawkes almost at his burning day. He answered with a tiny tear from his left eye. Hermione moved into Ron's lap, she mumbled:

'Why would a demon want to play around with two humans? Surely it is not that entertaining to mess with the misery of mortals.'

Minerva laughed bitterly, but she cut her-self short. 'Power, I suppose its power. Have you ever had the pleasure of governing the lives of

others, with dolls or chess. It's a game we've all played sometime in our lives. Demons live for the pleasure of it.'

'Isn't there anything we can do for Harry at all?' came a quiet inquiry from Ginny. She was ghostly pale; out of all the Gryffindors in the room she was clearly the most affected. Minerva tried to compile an answer, but looking at Ginny's broken eyes she could only manage a stutter:

'No, no, not unless he breaks the possession him-self. But it is not a normal possession; it doesn't work by the same rules. If anything can bring Harry out of his prison in his own body, then maybe, no, that's impossible, I am sorry. You better go, dinner will be served soon.'

Hermione saw the shining tears rolling down behind the Professor's glasses. She thought of comforting the teacher, but quickly realised she needed as much help her-self. All she could offer the Deputy Headmistress was silence. Hermione gathered the others and they left.

The castle was empty, the older years were still mostly in Hogsmeade and there was a drill conducted for the first and second years. They were taught the secret passageways to the dungeons so they could hide in case of attack.

The four Gryffindors walked past the Fat Lady and to the sixth year boys' dormitory. There they collapsed on the four beds that remained (Harry's was taken out and put into the Girl's room for Alya to sleep on). Hermione started sobbing, Ron punched his pillow, Neville stared out of the window and Ginny just sat there shivering slightly.

In the next few days Alya noticed Ron, Neville and Hermione becoming more withdrawn. It wasn't unusual for Hermione to spend her spare time in the library, but Ron was eager to accompany her and even Neville dragged along behind the pair. Alya also didn't fail to see how reluctant Ginny was about leaving her bed. Unquestioningly the girl was just sick, she looked like it certainly. Alya left her alone, as if Ginny would need her help.

The Malfoy had her own problems to deal with; Draco and Narcissa were in mourning. Lucius Malfoy had finally got his sticky end in the hands of Alastor Moody in an alley of Hogsmeade while protecting his master. Alya had attended the party held in the dead Death Eater's honour; the actual funeral would be several weeks later in tradition of the Malfoy family. A few people turned up at the party, mainly other Death Eaters whom Alya had no wish to see. Notable Severus Snape came; he paid no attention to either Alya or Draco. Afterwards he said a few words to Narcissa and returned to Hogwarts.

Alya knew for a fact the Potions Professor had a heart, she couldn't understand how he could miss Draco's grief; it seemed almost cruel. The boy worshipped Lucius since childhood; his father was probably the only person Draco loved. Snape could have taken a minute or two to comfort his student, Death Eater or not he was still human. Alya sighed, losing a father was a pain she knew, and even if her father were alive she would never see him. At some level she pitied Draco, but he didn't deserve it she knew that.

She pushed these thoughts aside and turned to her lukewarm breakfast. The Morning Prophet was spread out before her. She stuffed a bit of toast in her mouth and flipped through the thin, newspaper pages. Disfigured faces of Death Eaters lined the first few leaves. Many of them had long lists of crimes beneath the pictures. Alya turned to the graphic images of the Hogsmeade attack with several extensive articles about it.

Alya spilled her pumpkin juice, 1023 people killed! 1023! More than twice the number of people currently at Hogwarts. She couldn't believe the number, there simply couldn't have been that many people in the village. She read the article through after wiping most of the juice off. The numbers were from the two simultaneous attacks, not just Hogsmeade and breathed a little easier.

Alya further looked at the information about the other battle. About five pages back was another section completely devoted to Diagon Alley. The whole district was ruined, first attacked in much similar fashion to Hogsmeade even with all the Ministry's Aurors there the Death Eaters still managed their job perfectly. They reached St. Mungo's creating havoc there and eventually stood at the front gates



of the still leaderless Ministry. The Dark Lord then ordered full destruction of the hospital and the street, spells and Muggle bombs all contributed to it. Only shattered stones were left.

'Of all the places I want to be is in France, when the war finishes to whatever end it will be I'll get out of this miserable country and never return.' Alya muttered and left the Prophet on the table. It was soaking wet and stained, but other students were sure to be interested in the drier parts of it.

It was Friday morning, another cold sunless day in a series of too many. Tomorrow was meant to have been a Quidditch match, not an official one, but open to anyone who wanted to participate. A friendly game between Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff for safe measure, the other houses were not trusted to keep civil. But it was cancelled in favour of commemoration of the previous week's tragedies. Since it was breakfast time the halls were mostly empty, only Peeves giggled the level above Alya. She saw Hermione and Ron rushing to the just opened library and hurried after them.

Already Ron was piling up books in front of Hermione. The Gryffindors sat down opposite ends of a small table; they grabbed books off the tops of their stacks and began searching through the indices. Alya studied the titles of some of the discarded books 'An advanced approach to Possession', 'Powers of the mind over the body' others were similarly titled. Alya dropped them back with the rest saying:

'Don't bother looking for the cure; it doesn't exist. I have already searched both this library and the Malfoy one. I say if Dumbledore couldn't find the answer to our dilemma, there isn't one. Or maybe there is, to kill them both Harry and the Dark Lord.' Alya flinched at the last words. She was met by shocked silence from the other two. They couldn't understand how she could have known before them.

'I assume it is a matter of common knowledge among your circle of acquaintances.' Hermione said at last, she gave up on the books. 'Or had Professor McGonagall been kind enough to inform you too. I won't even suggest you spying, the one thing you dare not be guilty of.'

Alya grabbed a chair from underneath one of the neighbouring tables, it seemed less conspicuous that way, as if they were just discussing their homework, not that many students did it anymore.

‘McGonagall will not tell me a whim if her life depended on it, no, don’t worry I don’t snoop around your conversations either. Harry told me the story of the Founders some months ago; he half thought it was real and so did I. I did my research and came up with nothing. Don’t try to attack me, Ron! Yes, I spoke to Harry on occasions, but I can’t talk to him again without risking my skin and possibly his if Draco wants his prize enough.’ Alya stated, she wouldn’t give them the satisfaction of knowing the tight spot she put her-self in.

‘You mean all this time you knew the truth and didn’t even mention it! We are his best friends and you don’t say a thing to us, do you know how much we care about him!’ Ron shouted, Madam Pince shushed him immediately.

‘Really.’ Alya whispered moving closer to Ron’s face. ‘From what he said you were ignoring him completely lost in your shameless romance. Yes, those were his words and in the last few months you barely mentioned him. Trust me, I care about him a lot more th...’

She was cut short by a pony-tailed, red head bursting into the library. Ron jumped from his seat and ran to welcome Bill.

‘Hey Ronnie, hello Hermione, still in the library I see. I thought I would have to look in more private places that you have found to enjoy yourself in by now.’ Bill laughed as Ron and Hermione blushed. He never noticed Alya slowly retreat behind a shelf, he continued. ‘I walk into the Hall and I find it nearly empty. So I ask McGonagall where is everyone, she says that is everybody. What happened here?’

Ron sighed ‘A lot of things happened, lets not talk about it now. Dumbledore is still sick so no Defence again. Want to go flying?’

Bill looked at Hermione expecting her to scorn at the idea, but she seemed happy enough, he replied, ‘Okay, but only until Hermione starts to freeze from sitting outside for too long.’

They didn't actually go flying, a bunch of Seventh Year Slytherins were using the Pitch and Bill wasn't particularly keen on using the old school brooms anyway so he suggested a walk by the lake instead.

'Well I won't risk much by telling you this. I have been pretty much around the world at Dumbledore's request and no one has agreed to help us. The British Authorities have tried to keep everything quiet, but news about You-know-who continues leaking. People are afraid of the massacres that are occurring here happening in their own countries. A few of the old British colonies were sympathetic, but they couldn't risk it. Many countries such as Australia wouldn't have been much help to us in any case, the percentage of Magical people is small in an already miniscule population, but they are the nicest people I've ever met.'

Ron threw a stone into the lake; the squid was sleeping and didn't retrieve it. Ron growled, 'We get to see our friends and family suffer while you get friendly with the people who refuse to help us. Thank-you, Bill.'

'You spend five minutes talking to an Aussie and you'll be convinced he is your new best friend. I had nothing else to do, the British Ministry kept me there forbidding me to leave. Ron, you should have come with me, you would have loved it, their history is so fascinating.' Bill could see out of the corner of his eye Hermione gave her full attention to him, while Ron was just lost in his day dreams. Bill started humming a new song he had learned a short time ago; he eventually switched to singing out right as the three reached the edge of the forest.

'I am sorry about Percy; I didn't expect it any more than you or mum. How is she by the way? Oh, you wouldn't have seen her either. I wish I could stay in England permanently, but Gringotts wants me back. The guy who replaced me had some problems with the goblins.'

I am only in Hogwarts for the weekend, on Monday I have to go to the Burrow then report to the Order. By the end of the week I have to be back in Egypt.' Bill said, he wasn't oblivious to Ron's anger and he

did want to spend more time with his youngest brother, but life wouldn't allow it. Hermione decided to wake:

'Bill, you know about Harry right?' she paused, to her relief Bill nodded; it would have been hard to explain it to him. 'Can you talk to Ginny about it then? Ever since we found out she seems to be in some sort of shock and won't let us take her to Madam Pomfrey. Neville can't get through to her either, we don't know what to do.' Bill shrugged:

'Alright, I'll do my best.'

They turned back towards the castle, Ron and Hermione had Potions to attend and Snape was as fierce in his Gryffindor hatred as ever. He pretty much given up on teaching instead spent the periods complaining about the stupidity of Gryffindors, still this required everyone to be present and ready for lessons.

Bill went up to the Gryffindor Tower; he had to argue with the Fat Lady for half an hour before he got in. She claimed he was too old to enter even if he knew the password. Bill won only by pointing out his red hair, which meant he was a Weasley and they could be trusted. He was glad the portrait didn't know about Percy.

When he entered Ginny's dormitory she looked asleep, but as he approached her she stirred and rolled over to face him. Bill did his best improvisation of Mrs. Weasley and prepared for a long talk.

## Chapter 22 –The end of ends

Minerva McGonagall was at loss. After a week or so of sleep broken up into blocks of slightly more than an hour each night her condition was much to be desired for. A potion, spells, even coffee was nothing compared to real rest. But sleep was not a commodity she had the time for.

The castle too didn't help, while walking from her office to the Hospital Wing the ever-moving stairways misled her twice. The Deputy Headmistress growled, barely managing to wriggle out her foot out of a fake stair. The lights flickered; Minerva hurried along her lips drawn as tight as they could go. Spider webs, moths, and she wasn't sure if she was delusional or if there really was a rat scuttling away from her as she walked past. She stammered:

'Merlin, what has this place gotten to?'

Severus Snape stood at the doorway to the Hospital Wing; he looked perhaps worse than Minerva. She nodded as he placed his hand over her shoulder. Together they entered the sunlit room. There was only one patient, the rest have been tended to and thrown out before they had the chance to see anything. Madam Pomfrey was fretting over the patient's still figure.

'I dare say the potions had no effect.' Snape said darkly. He patted Minerva on the back and leaned to the bedside table to see the dosages of the potions. His hands travelled over the dozen or so bottles on the table nearly all of them stood empty. Snape swept up all the bottles into his hands and as Minerva screamed threw them on the ground. Glass shattered and went flying off in all directions, whatever liquid was inside spilled all over the glossy floor.

'Severus, I know you are frustrated as we all are, but you are making a mess. And Minerva please stay calm, all we want is more racket in here, the students walking past is enough.' Madam Pomfrey took a minute to leave her patient and get Snape a broom. 'Yes, you, clean it up. I don't have the time.'

Severus sharply grabbed the broom out of the Nurse's hands and stared at it. He was much more familiar with using a broom as a tool for flying rather than cleaning. He tried a few confused strokes with it but then whipped out his wand. The Muggle-borns could do the cleaning this way but he was a wizard after all.

'Now children, it's about time you stopped bickering.' Came a weak voice from the bed. Madam Pomfrey instantly went off on a fury of questions. She barely gave Dumbledore enough time to answer.

'Poppy!' the other two Professors exclaimed almost simultaneously. Severus pulled the Nurse back; she was half on top of the Headmaster. Immediately Minerva started her own string of questions. Dumbledore managed a quick smile, he felt too weak to do much beyond that. His beard especially was thin, the hairs were now easily broken. He had taken to plucking them out during the long nights in the infirmary when he couldn't sleep.

Madam Pomfrey took off and soon returned from her office carrying a fresh cup of some potion only she knew the name of.

'Let me be!' Dumbledore growled; pulling away from the potion. 'For the time that I have left I do not need it.' Snape lifted the beaker out of Poppy's hand and placed it on the table, he gave a sad smile to Minerva.

'Shall we -' Severus paused 'Shall we go and get them?'

Snape watched Dumbledore seemingly shrink into his bed. If this was the end then so be it, the old man would retain his dignity. This day however was long in coming, the Headmaster long held his malady secret from everyone around him. But some symptoms could not be hidden; somebody eventually asked why he wasn't practicing magic anymore or why he looked so frail and withered.

The Headmaster gave no reply to Severus' question, Minerva sighed and marched out to Dumbledore's office to deliver the items in question.

'I must thank-you, Severus, for all these years of friendship and loyalty. It is strange, I shan't witness the last day of this school, but my spy

will.' Dumbledore stuttered. 'If I am fated to be the last Headmaster of Hogwarts, watch your heads.'

Snape grimaced; Madam Pomfrey disappeared into her office. He could see through the doorway, she had her face buried in her hands. The Potions Master inhaled slowly 'There has to be a Headmaster as long as the school stands, you have to appoint one, Albus.'

The older man looked away 'No, Hogwarts is Harry's; he claimed it, now it's his responsibility as long as he lives. I can hardly overrule the age-old traditions.'

Heavy breathing told Snape that Minerva was back. In her left hand she had the Sorting Hat and in her right Godric's sword. Dumbledore pushed himself up:

'Listen, if hope against hope the end will be good you are to present these to Harry, should he accept them. He will fix up things the best he can. If not, but Hogwarts still stands at the end of the week you two are to take my place. I cannot break the traditions but I can bend them to the advantage of all. Hogwarts shall have two Headmasters of equal rank. They will no longer tolerate House rivalry. You understand me?'

Hush fell in the room, Minerva handed the sword over to Severus who shakily accepted it. Dumbledore sunk into the sheets and blankets around him:

'By the Hat and the Sword so be it.' Dumbledore looked out the window 'Now, get out of my sight!'

Of Dumbledore and his last deeds many songs were later sung, especially on eves of battles and during delicious feasts. It was said he was never again seen by a living man nor was his body ever found. The School Nurse walked into the room to find his bed empty and the sheets clean to perfection. What was marked as the grave of one of the greatest men in history stood empty, the casket not even inside.

But those days were dark and rumours many, uncountable yarns have grown about the day. Where truth ends and imagination begins

is not longer certain. One tells of a white dove that dived out of the window of the room, it was seen by students outside. It flew away from the school, past the Forbidden Forest and disappeared over the horizon.

Who ever said that Dumbledore was the one thing holding Hogwarts together was proven right that day. Severus and Minerva cautiously placed their artefacts back where they belonged, the shelves. Every portrait in the Headmaster's office was wide-awake, many wept, some sang in lamentation.

'Thou wilt not enter should thou leavest this place.' cried one. Snape nodded and grabbed Minerva by the arm, with all things considered they would not need to see the place again indeed.

The castle was stone quiet; the staircase would not take them down. It wasn't that far to walk, but they were so used to the elevator like motion of the stair it was unnerving. The hallway was clothed in darkness, the sunlight refused to penetrate the dusty windows and Filch was not lighting the lanterns yet. Minerva paled when she realised one of the other stairs was stuck not joining to anything. There was a fifty-foot drop from the end of it. She asked:

'I don't suppose you know why this is happening? In all my years I've never seen a staircase stop in mid-air. Severus?'

'I have some theories but all of them are too dreary for my likes.' Snape replied gruffly, he was still not certain as to why he was given the famous Ruby Sword. He had to be one of the worst caretakers possible, Severus has a knack for losing things. In battle too he doubted he would need it apart from showing off. Surely Dumbledore didn't mean for him to manage Hogwarts? Severus hated children of all ages.

He swang open the doors of the Great Hall and looked around the room. Quiet was deafening and nervousness filled the air as the two Professors stood in awe. Of the two hundred or so people in the room all stared upwards to the ceiling or at least to the place where it used to be. Snape's mind refused to accept it; perhaps if it didn't reflect the weather accurately it would have been all right, but not this. Where



Severus always assumed were the stone beams of the roof was nothing, only clouded sky.

‘Am I imagining things or is it about to rain?’ Minerva too was smitten by the development; her voice was deathly. The truth then struck her like lightning in a winter storm, ‘It will not be magical rain that will fall, but real water if it does. It will erode all stone and marble of this place until nothing is left but ruins. The magic of the school is kept with the Headmaster and he is dead. Where are the spells and enchantments gone?’

‘The Battle is about to begin!’ suddenly shouted Snape with entire shrill his throat could manage. ‘Hogwarts is defenceless!’

Not a single student or teacher failed to hear his cry, panic broke out with tears already falling from worried eyes. Some fled, some hid under tables, some screamed or sat frozen in their place. It was a minute before hush fell again and this time it was more horrid than previous. Minerva and Severus could see all were watching them. One drop of water fell onto a golden plater.

‘Don’t just do nothing! Come on round up the junior years and get them down to the dungeons. We’ve prepared for this, just like the drills! Come on, move!’ Minerva ordered frantically. Hesitatingly the students began to move, the first, second and third years were perfectly eager to get away from where the action will be. Fourth years were not as keen, but their older brothers and sisters sent them off with the prefects. The monstrous sounding bells rang through the castle and the grounds to alert anyone who did not yet know. A dozen more droplets fell.

Severus drew his breath and exhaled sharply, what was coming now he had no idea how to prepare for. But there might be a glimmer of hope, if, IF, the ancient enchantments still held. The new spells would have been wiped out, but the magic cast by the Founders could be intact. How to check? He could remember Dumbledore hastily saying something about it, if only Severus could remember! Everybody will know... Everybody will know... It began pouring in full; all was drenched in seconds.

For all potions and ingredients he could remember at will he was at loss at a simple sentence. Snape turned to McGonagall and looked at her, he then shook his head Minerva would be no help. Everybody will know when...when...Dumbledore was signing some papers; his face was cast in shadows as the candles went out. Everybody will know when the Founders have deserted us. The two heirs have turned against us, blood will run in rivers.

Severus stormed out of the Hall and ran to his office. Nothing could save them now, not even the pitiful Gryffindor bravery. What he knew and didn't know no longer mattered, he was just another fool about to die. Snape looked at the cold fireplace, he could run at least for a while but what was that going to achieve, a few weeks of living in darkness and self-pity. He took out his wand and began polishing it with his sleeve, one last time.

Eight levels above him in the Gryffindor Tower there was a sheer frenzy. Students were packing their things and writing letters to their families. Out of the fifth years only Ginny and Colin remained, everyone else was gone, either transferred to a different school or simply dead. The sixth and seventh years were not as diminished, since the Hogsmeade occurrence they have grown a lot closer and at the present time was just sitting on the couches saying nothing.

Ron and Hermione smiled sadly at each other then turned to face Ginny who was sitting on Neville's lap. Neville nodded not trusting himself to speak, he turned to the window. Outside a seemingly solid wall of water was rushing down to the ground. Lightning lit the room and thunder made everyone's ears ring.

Alya as usual did not sit with the rest, but stood in the doorway. She held a crumpled, tear stained note in her left hand and her wand in her right. The school robes had been discarded together with all the school insignia and she was now wearing her Death Eater clothing. Alya banged her mask lightly against the door and coughed catching Hermione's attention.

'I am sorry, but I have to do this. I swear not to hurt one of you intentionally, but I must go now. Should I return, take no vengeance against me, I'd run away to only protect my own skin, but in the time

I've spent with you I was taught not to, so today I will take up my wand, whatever that might bring.' Alya said handing Hermione the piece of paper. Ron curiously stared at it and kissed his girlfriend. Alya's face did not change and she turned away walking slowly but with assurance that she knew she was right.

Seamus sunk deeper into his chair. Ever since he found out about Harry becoming a Death Eater he pretty much gave up. 'Well, it has been nice knowing you all. I am not going to move from this couch until they come for me, a few hours of life suddenly seem precious when before you wouldn't have cared. I only with Lavender was here with me.'

Lightning lit the room with uneasy greenish light as Hermione turned away from Ron and stood up. She grabbed a quill, ink and a piece of paper out of some seventh year's hands. Spreading the sheet out on her lap she started scribbling writing so messily it was hardly recognisable. After a few hurried lines she stopped. The ink had run out and she was lost for words. Hermione gave up looking as wild as when she started:

'There is no point, no point absolutely; he'll never read it. You-know-who will burn the castle to the ground and no one will ever see it.'

'Who is the message for? I thought you finished writing to your parents.' Ginny asked. She shivered in the fading light and growing shadows. She took the note from Hermione and started violently shaking. 'Harry? You are writing to Harry! The boy who should have died the day he was born! You are actually telling him you love him! What are you thinking!'

'He is our friend; you used to admire him. It is not his fault that he turned this way. And you know the one thing we forgot to mention in all these months, is not that he is the one who is supposed to save us or that he is great at Quidditch, but that he is a great friend! Don't tell me you don't care for him at all, Ginny, you have to forgive him for this!' Hermione returned painstakingly highlighting every note of her words. 'Come on, I'll get more ink; the rest of you might as well finish it together. I have nothing else to say to him.'

Ron was embarrassed to see others uncomfortably sitting glancing at each other out of the corner of their eyes. There was no need to go to upstairs for more ink, there was plenty left over from students around the Common Room. Ron unscrewed a bottle of red ink and shared a few of his thoughts with the paper. He handed the note and the quill to Neville who accepted it with no complaint.

'If you think there is no point to this, why do you insist we write something?' Ginny still felt sceptical and with the emotions running high she had to take everything out on someone.

Hermione observed Neville writing a long passage barely stopping to dip his quill in the inkbottle. 'I don't know, but I want to.'

Ron closed the shutters and added more logs to the great fire burning. But it was no use, as if the flames themselves were made of ice the room was freezing and there was no relief. Thunder roared outside shaking the floor, a fell stench was in the air which all could feel yet couldn't explain apart from stating it was the essence of death to come.

'Hogwarts, Hogwarts,  
Hoggy, Warty Hogwarts  
Teach us something please,  
Whether we be old and bald  
Or young with scabby knees,  
Our heads could do with filling  
With some interesting stuff,  
For now they're bare and full of air  
Dead flies and bits of fluff.  
So teach us things worth knowing,  
Bring back what we forgot,  
Just do your best, we'll do the rest  
And learn until our brains all rot.' Ron suddenly sang with a slightly croaky voice but decent tuning to the slow funeral march Fred and George sung at his first Hogwarts feast. The others smiled a little, the song brought back memories of happier times and with them a reminder of innocence they once possessed.

Neville finally finished with his part of the note and handed it to Ginny. The thunder slowed its coming and its pitch, summer storms do not last long. The Gryffindors breathed no easier, the rain was less potent, but it grew no lighter and the air was no fresher. The paper went around the circle until it came back to Hermione with no more room left.

She took herself to the make shift board where all other letters to relatives and friends were attached. There must have been at least a hundred hanging there, some were hastily written, some in elegant flowery script with love-hearts around the borders. She found a little spot in the corner, a tight fit but manageable. All that mattered was that it could be seen with Harry's name on it.

Just off to the side Alya was still sitting much frustrated by the atmosphere around her. She rubbed her arm, no, the burning pain she expected wasn't there, yet. Perhaps they were waiting for the weather to turn. Fighting in the rain was no more convenient for Death Eaters than for anyone else. Or they were making sure Hogwarts was definitely on the verge of breaking, that was the plan. Whatever the reason for delay might have been Alya felt no better, it was just waiting to be pushed off the cliff but the person behind you is taking their time.

Alya watched Hermione return to her friends into Ron's soothing arms. She felt a pang of jealousy, the only man Alya ever loved she gave up because of her fright and lies. There was no future for either of them together, but maybe apart they stood a chance if they didn't ask what kind of future that will be. Alya chipped the edges of the mask with her fingers, a few splinters came out. At last the burning started, her arm felt swollen because of it but Alya ignored it.

She left her chair behind and went up to the board; she didn't hang any messages up. Her one she gave to Hermione, this was a simple apology for all the trouble Hermione went to in her mission to reach to Alya's friendlier side. Not that she ever achieved it, but Alya appreciated the gesture. The blonde reached up to Harry's name and ripped it down. She stuffed it in her pocket further bending the already crumpled note.

One more breath of the Gryffindor air and she closed the door behind her. None saw her leave and none later wondered where she was.

The Forbidden Forest proved an invaluable aid that Voldemort was not expecting and so did the disappearance of the roof. As the storm seized with its most violent rain he began his advances. He found him-self on the Eastern side of the castle rooted amidst the enclosing trees. A third of the Death Eaters were with him, at the present time they were hungrily staring at the castle windows waiting for an occasional student to pass by. The Dark Lord didn't ask them to stop, but he didn't appreciate their quick comments about those inside the castle either.

On the Western side Arhimar was no less eager to engage in the actual conflict than his Death Eaters. He paced around his troops muttering incantations for curses under his breath. One thing that troubled him in particular was Malfoy hovering somewhere above, he still hated him with a passion. And if not for Tom he would never have given him the task of flying over head to later get into the castle, infact he would have sent Draco to the wolves months ago. But he had to compromise, the Malfoy gets their special moment of glory then Arhimar can shoot him later.

Arhimar stopped in his tracks, a Death Eater was handing him something. A sheet of parchment scrawled across and signed by different hands. The Death Eater spoke revealing her feminine voice:

'It is for you, my lord, they wish you to read it if you may.'

Arhimar accepted the paper and wavered the girl away, he thought perhaps she might be the one he befriended, but she walked away before he dared to ask. He sat down to read it barely making out the letters from the shadows of the trees, their words were sorrowful, but calm. Arhimar couldn't remember half of the names or recount many things that they mentioned; he was only left confused. Arhimar's vision span, for a second he almost felt they were right, he should return, but no, he couldn't shake the beast off.

Voldemort too had his doubts, in his confused mind thoughts were stirring in larger quantities than what he could manage. He delayed

sending the attack signal, for his own grief perhaps. As the Death Eaters saw Hagrid emerge from the Castle and run to his Cabin, they recognised him and shouted. At that moment the Dark Lord's plan was fully unleashed, all the Dementors of Azkaban left their hiding places and rushed towards the lone figure they felt. A hundred Dementors swooped towards the gamekeeper within seconds; soon he lay dead. Why he was outside no one found the time to ask as at that moment the battle began.

The teachers of the school, not quite seeing the Dementors, but obvious to Hagrid's death rushed forward out of the safety of the school screaming curses and spells. Most of those were in vain, normal spells could hardly hurt the Guards of Azkaban and there were too many to be thrown down so easily. A few tried the Patronus, mainly the students who rushed out after the teachers no less fierce than their professors.

Dementors came down from every corner casting a cloud of hopelessness and despair; their hoods were down revealing their toothless mouths to the horror of others. Death Eaters did not wait long either, in the mass shouts of the Unforgivables were soon heard as often as cries of pain.

All wind and rain seized and the world was still to witness the battle. Dozens of boats arrived carrying Aurors, Order members and a few volunteers from Hogsmeade. They jumped out of their boats with proud shout of 'Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus!' and attacked the Death Eaters from behind.

Lights of curses blinded no longer, there were simply so many it was a consistent light source as bright as any lamp or fire could be. Snape struggled to remain focused as around him humans fell to the ground. Death Eaters used handguns once more as in Hogsmeade, but they were not aiming. A wand in one hand that was controlled and a gun in the other, they swung guns carelessly occasionally pressing the trigger in hope of hitting the enemy. Severus ducked spells and jumped, he was about to cast one of his own when his leg erupted in pain. He fell.

Alya ran behind him, in some protection from the spells and tripped over the Potion Master's body. She dropped her gun and jumped away as far as she could. She had not meant to shoot anyone, let alone a person she knew.

Death Eaters were flooding Hogwarts from the roof and from the front doors; the Order didn't stop them. What is the point of saving a building if there is no one inside? The younger students trapped inside were forgotten.

Arhimar unlike most was having a time of his life, Dementors did their job by picking out the weakest in the enemy, the Death Eaters further plucked the ranks and the next surprise was going to destroy the opposition completely. He threw the Avada kedavra at Moody who got the full blast as he protected a fifth year from the death flying towards him.

A turning point came into the fight, fifty giant spiders that Arhimar mustered revealed themselves from the forest and joined the confusion. Ron's screams were heard on the other side of the battlefield and in the school itself. He abandoned his bravery and ran leaving his girlfriend behind him. Hermione was unconscious before she hit the ground being stung in the back.

Alya then gave up all her acting, she threw a spell at the spider and although it wasn't hurt the spider turned away in fright. She found Hermione, still thankfully breathing and dragged her away from the combat. Ron, who by the time thought over his arachnophobia, was looking for Hermione.

'Take care of her! She is lucky to be alive so far!' Alya shouted at him pounding him in the chest. 'You insensitive jerk just left her! Come on; get out of here!'

Ron stared at her then turned to face the battle and paled. He grabbed Hermione's still form and ran in the opposite direction. Alya felt tears coming down, she didn't know why, but they came and there was no stopping them. She was afraid Voldemort would turn and see her doing nothing. She couldn't bear the thought of his punishment later, so she returned to the screams and yells of the dying. A piece



of her heart broke as Colin sunk to the ground his face covered with wet earth. She saw the only person who in her mind was responsible and she attacked.

Arhimar shielded from the spell and cast another in return. He couldn't be bothered with treachery when so much else was happening. But his time was long taken up by the unannounced duel.

'Stupefy!' the Death Eater yelled, Arhimar ducked and cast an Imperius in return. Alya jumped to the side avoiding the Unforgivable and onto Flitwick's still form. She refused to look at the Professor's greyed face instead casting a simple expellamus. Arhimar blocked it, Alya ran fleeing from what she had started, but he raced after her screaming more curses at her back.

Spells increased in pain and horror, their responses grew faster as they dropped to the ground, jumped and rolled to avoid the curses. Their robes were soaked in mud, Alya was tired but Arhimar's attacks persisted. Arhimar wanted the traitor alive; to be punished later but the opponent did not allow it. He gave one more chance before he pulled the death card.

'AEGRESCO!!!' he cried out his wand pointed at the person before him. The girl fell to the ground her hood falling back revealing her delicate, pale face. Harry realised he knew her; it was Alya. He hurt probably killed the girl he loved; it was his nightmare coming true.

A sick sensation came through his mind; what he did then was wrong, horribly wrong, it was evil. He stared out at the battle field, where Death Eaters fought against the kids he was once friends with and the ones he had once helped train to fight.

How did it all come to this?

It was all clear all of a sudden as if something that clouded his vision has shifted, revealing the true colours of things around him. He turned around, there was Voldemort torturing another person; grimly Harry thought the figure whimpering on the ground resembled Neville Longbottom. Harry remembered what had happened to Neville's

parents and he also remembered the pain he had once suffered from the Cruciatus curses, the pain Neville must be feeling at that moment.

All of the curses cast by Voldemort's wand did that.

Something clicked in his head, turning around again he saw Severus Snape in the distance lying on the ground but still firing cursed at those he could reach. Arhimar searched for Dumbledore, but slowly he remembered that someone told him he had died a few days ago.

Some curse cast by one of the Death Eaters.

One by one he saw the remains of the Order struggling to defend themselves as the Death Eaters flooded the castle. He was horrified to see Ginny trying to create a Patronus as dozens of Dementors swarmed around her and Ron with Hermione in his arms. By the looks of it, Ron had hit his head; there was blood trickling down the side of his face.'

'What are you going to do now?' His mind asked in a rather stringy tone 'This is it, this is where you decide what person you really are.'

Voldemort is the one who is responsible. He made me kill, he, he is Evil, not everyone else.

Rotating back to Voldemort, Harry drew his handgun. He only needed one shot, but he fired every bullet he had. Voldemort deserved it; the bullets hit their mark, right in the heart killing the Dark Lord almost instantly.

Harry snorted for a second, the irony of the Dark Lord's death coming from his most trusted ally and with a Muggle weapon no less. All of a sudden Harry felt like his body was being wrenched apart as the Voldemort fell to the ground, thousands of voices screamed inside him, there were very few that he recognized or even understood. His scar seared with pain of a thousand Crucious , yet he did not cry out, as his lips seemed sealed together. He collapsed to his knees almost passing out from pain. The agony stopped sharply, from his tear filled eyes he saw a bright green and gold lights erupting from Voldemort mangled form.

'I have chosen many years ago. Even before I came to Hogwarts'. Harry stated proudly hoping to keep his voice from shaking.

Everyone who have not yet fled watched Voldemort body turn to ashes before their eyes, with one scarlet spark all traces of the Dark Lord vanished leaving only his broken wand.

"We won" most yelled as Dementors retreated and Death Eaters ran for the woods. The Order and the students jumped about in joy and hugged their few friends left standing. No one noticed a lone man dropping his weapon; he fell backwards into the wet soil as his body let go of its strength.

## Epilogue

'Harry Potter

The Boy who died to save us all

Our greatest friend and one time enemy

May in death you be happier than in life.'

Ron read out the all too familiar inscription and stared around the little crypt erected for the greatest Heroes of the War. There was only one entrance, three marble steps up and Harry's grave was in front of you. On the left was an empty coffin of Tom Marvolo Riddle who had been officially pardoned, though never entirely forgiven. On the other side in golden letters was written 'Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore'. His body rested there with an image of fawkes carved into the lid instead of any other words.

A gentle hand rested on Ron's shoulder, five long years since the battle but scars were still swollen and fresh. Alya smiled weakly on the verge of tears, but she held them back and exited the crypt. Ron followed her, as he came out a huge field of crosses stretched out before him. The War Cemetery, on the grounds of Hogwarts. Ron remembered Hermione telling him of muggle Soldiers buried after Great Wars in similar fashion, people lying in rows upon rows of shallow graves.

He paused at the bottom step and turned back at the marble building again. His best friend, his mentor and his nightmare all lay inside. Harry consumed by a thing inside him just as Voldemort had half a century before. He broke free and won the war, but at the cost of his own life. Ron couldn't forgive Harry for leaving like that, but not even Dumbledore guessed the strength of Harry's and Voldemort's bond.

'Let's go, Ron.' Alya urged 'We need to visit the others still.'

Ron nodded, but his hands shook. Together the two Gryffindors passed their friends and enemies lying side by side. George and Hannah lay there, Ernie, Marrietta, Dean, Draco, Luna, Oliver, Cho,

Tonks, Kingsley, Moody, Remus, Flitwick, Lucius, Wormtail and so many others whose names didn't immediately spring to mind. Even Seamus was there even though he died in a death eater attack on his home after the war was officially over. Ron went down to the grave he really wanted to see, standing before the delicate cross he placed a bunch of roses before it.

'Its good to see you again, Hermione.' Ron said, unlike Alya behind him he was openly crying. There was some guilt left over the fact he had left Hermione alone on the battle field. She died of complications from her injuries.

While Ron told his dead lover of all that went on in his life Alya tuned out all sound. She concentrated on her luck to have survived unlike Harry. He didn't kill her of-course, just knocked unconscious. After the climax of the battle someone had found her and she was taken to a makeshift hospital. A few months later she was even awarded a low class medal for bravery, a fact she still couldn't understand.

Not far away a roar erupted, someone had caught the snitch. Even after all that happened the house rivalry couldn't be cured. There was nothing a Gryffindor could be more proud of than to outsmart a Slytherin. Quidditch matches between the rivals were still the most anticipated events for the year. By the shouts it sounded like the Slytherins had won this time.

The Headmistress won't be pleased, she still went for Gryffindor in Quidditch. McGonagall as was expected got the top job much to the delight of her House. Snape on the other hand flatly refused to be a Deputy and two months later retired completely complaining about his injuries in the war. Alya's guilt rose everytime she saw the old Potions Master with a cane limping around his laboratory. Snape now worked for a small hospital making potions all day and seemed happier for it.

'Ali! Ronald! We need to go, France is waiting.' Came a baritone voice from the distance. Alya smiled and took Ron's hand, a tall blond man hugged them both.

'You are early, dad!' said Alya.

'I just can't wait to have you two home again. Remember no making out in the cupboards, I provided you with comfortable rooms for a reason.' The blond laughed. Alya couldn't understand it, after getting out of prison he changed, as if he had a reason to enjoy his life again. She didn't mind at all, a father figure who smiled was a definite plus to her life.

'I told you before, Mr. Malfoy. There is nothing between you daughter and I.'

'Lysander, we went over this last week, Ron. No, of-course there is nothing, you work together, you live together, you take your holidays together, you have no relationships with anyone else. Alya, you know I always liked redheads, wink, wink.'

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I am going to be evil and leave it to you to figure out if there is anything between Alya and Ron or not.